Spring 2007

America's Most Influential Education Journal
IN THE NEWS

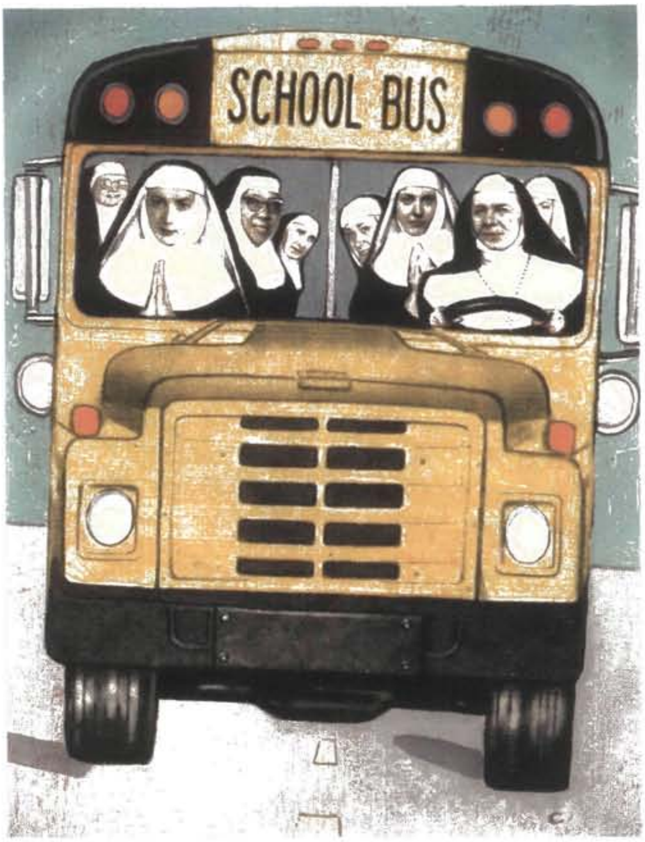
EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Mission Impossible?

Catholic schools face challenging times

PETER MEYER



IN THIS ISSUE:

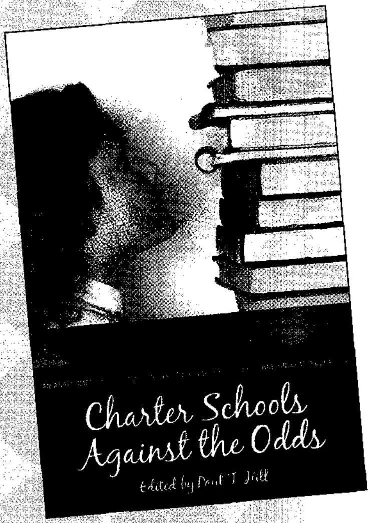
Policing Teacher Dispositions, Software Buyer Beware, Special Ed Private Placements, Barriers to Entrepreneurship, the Thirteen Most Influential Education Studies, Character Education

CONTRIBUTORS: JAY GREENE, LAURIE HINES, TODD OPPENHEIMER, PAUL DOVRE, MICHELLE RHEE, KIM SMITH, JOAN SNOWDEN, STEVEN WILSON, SARA FRY, SANDY KRESS, FREDERICK HESS, CHESTER FINN

www.educationnext.org / $7.00

New from Education Next Books

An Assessment by Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education



CHARTER SCHOOLS AGAINST THE ODDS

EDITED BY PAUL HILL

The uphill battle faced by charter schools–and how they can overcome the odds.

Charter schools—born into a hostile environment—are publicly funded schools operated by independent groups under contract with government agencies that provide a valuable alternative to traditional, bureaucratically operated school districts. But state laws and policies have stacked the deck against them by limiting the number of charter schools allowed in a state, forbidding for-profit firms from holding charters, forcing them to pay rent out of operating funds, and many other ways. *Charter Schools against the Odds* explains how these policies can be amended to level the playing field and give charter schools—and the children they serve—a fairer chance to succeed.

Paul T. Hill is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. He is also a research professor in the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, both at the University of Washington.

October 2006 215 pages
ISBN: 0-8179-4761-2 $25.00 Cloth
ISBN: 0-8179-4762-0 $15.00 Paper

COURTING FAILURE

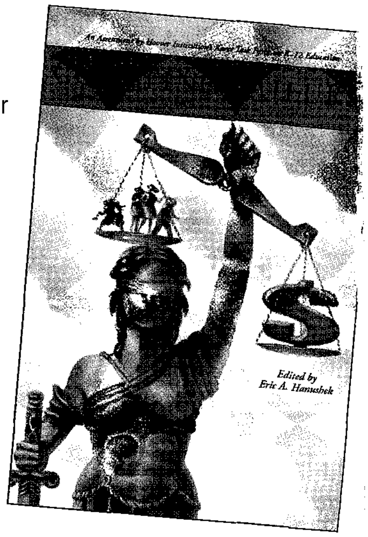
How School Finance Lawsuits Exploit Judges' Good Intentions and Harm Our Children

EDITED BY ERIC A. HANUSHEK

Lawsuits over the adequacy of school financing have appeared in a majority of states, but no evidence about their potential impact on students has been available. *Courting Failure* assesses recent court actions in school adequacy lawsuits and their impact on student outcomes and shows that judicial actions regarding school finance have in fact not had a beneficial effect on student performance.

Eric A. Hanushek is the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. He serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Board for Education Sciences.

October 2006 367 pages
ISBN 0-8179-4781-7 $25.00 Cloth
ISBN 0-8179-4782-5 $15.00 Paper


An Assessment by Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education
Edited by Eric A. Hanushek

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . *ideas defining a free society*

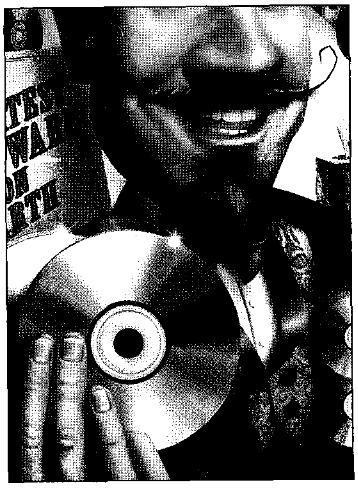
STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Stanford California 94305-6010 Toll-free: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

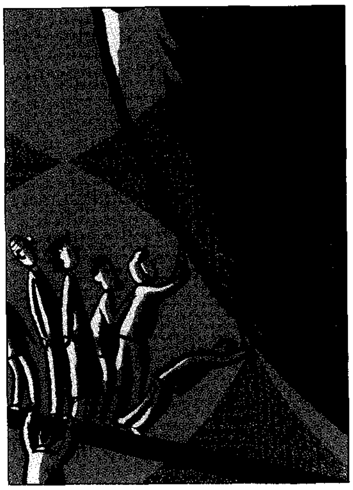
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH





22 30 46

features

12 Can Catholic Schools Be Saved?

Lacking nuns and often students, a shrinking system looks for answers by PETER MEYER

22 Selling Software

How vendors manipulate research and cheat students by TODD OPPENHEIMER

30 Confessions of a "No Child Left Behind" Supporter

An interview with Sandy Kress

38 From Aristotle to Angelou

Best practices in character education by PAUL J. DOVRE

forum

46 Why Big Impact Entrepreneurs Are Rare

What Innovators Can, and Cannot, Do by FREDERICK M. HESS and CHESTER E. FINN JR.

Entrepreneurs Can Innovate and Advocate by MICHELLE RHEE and DAVID KEELING

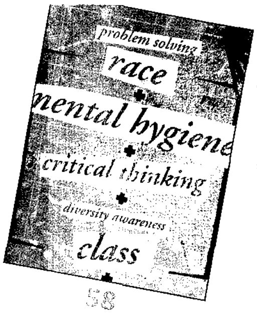
Challenge the Status Quo by STEVEN F. WILSON

Piecemeal Entrepreneurship Is Not the Answer by JOAN SNOWDEN

Leverage from the Outside by KIM SMITH

research

58 Return of the Thought Police?
The history of teacher attitude adjustment
by LAURIE MOSES HINES



58

check the facts

67 Debunking a Special Education Myth
Don't blame private options for rising costs
CHECKED by JAY P. GREENE and MARCUS A. WINTERS

from the editors

5 The Entrepreneurs and the New Commission
by PAUL E. PETERSON

the legal beat

11 Courts and Choice
by JOSH DUNN and MARTHA DERTHICK

correspondence

6 *Teacher certification; adequacy studies; national standards; restructuring under NCLB; spotlight on Newark; getting kids to exercise*

book review

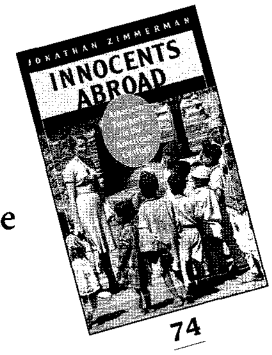
72 Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking
BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

Think: Why Crucial Decisions Can't Be Made in the Blink of an Eye
BY MICHAEL R. LEGAULT

Blank: The Power of Not Actually Thinking at All
BY NOAH TALL

REVIEWED BY DIANE RAVITCH

74 Book Alert



74

what next

77 The Key to Research Influence
BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

school life

80 Mutual Selection Beats Random Assignment
by SARA FRY

COVER ILLUSTRATION / *Craig LaRotonda*

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Editor-in-Chief	Paul E. Peterson
Senior Editor	Chester E. Finn Jr.
Executive Editors	Frederick M. Hess Marci Kanstoroom Michael J. Petrilli
Research Editor	Martin West
Managing Editor	Carol Peterson
Manuscript Editor	Kathryn Ciffolillo
Design Director	Bruce Sanders
Graphics Editor	Mark Linnen
Research Manuscript Editor	Tammy Frisby
Consulting Editor	Jay P. Greene
Editorial Staff	Susan Pasternack, Sarah Bruce
Design Production	Robin Cheung
Web Editor	Bridgitt Ahern
Circulation	Jennifer Presley
Editorial Board	John E. Chubb, Eric A. Hanushek, Paul Hill, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Caroline M. Hoxby, Terry M. Moe, Diane Ravitch, Herbert Walberg

Publisher	Hoover Institution, Leland Stanford Junior University

Additional Sponsoring Institutions	Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

Subscriptions One-year subscription (four issues), $20 in the United States; $30 in Canada; $40 elsewhere. To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at (800) 935-2882; fax us at (650) 723-8626; visit us at www.educationnext.org; or email us at educationnext@hoover.stanford.edu. You may also write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010. Cover price is $7/issue. ISSN 1539-9672.

Advertising For information on advertising, please contact Advertising Manager, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 495-6954, en_ads@ksg.harvard.edu.

Letters We welcome letters about our contents. Longer versions of some letters may be found at www.educationnext.org. Write to Letters to the Editor, *Education Next*, 309 CGIS South, 1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; fax to (617) 496-1507; or email Editor_EN@gov.harvard.edu.

Editorial Queries We consider unsolicited contributions. Send manuscript submissions as email attachments to Editor_EN@latte.harvard.edu. Pieces sent by regular mail go to Carol Peterson, *Education Next*, 309 CGIS South, 1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Opinions expressed in *Education Next* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board of *Education Next*, the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, or the sponsors of *Education Next*.

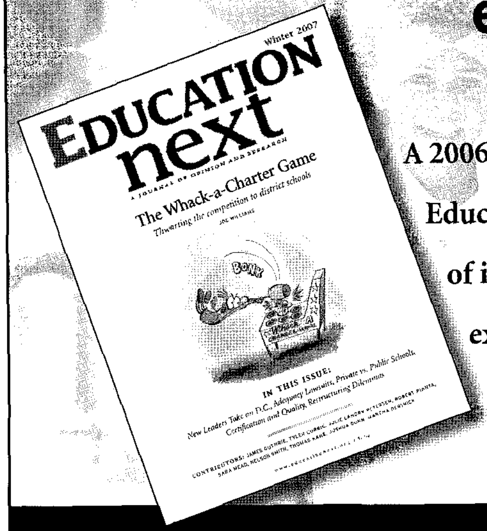
Visit us at http://www.educationnext.org, where unabridged essays can be found.

© by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, 2007

A recent survey of policy makers by Editorial Projects in Education identified only one journal, *Education Next*, among the 10 most influential sources of information on education.

Education Next

The most influential journal in education policy.


Winter 2007
EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH
The Whack-a-Charter Game
Thwarting the competition to district schools
IN THIS ISSUE:

A 2006 study by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center named Education Next as the only journal among the ten most influential sources of information about education policy. The assessment was based on an extensive survey of the education field's opinion-elite.

To subscribe visit **www.educationnext.org** or call **1-800-935-2882**

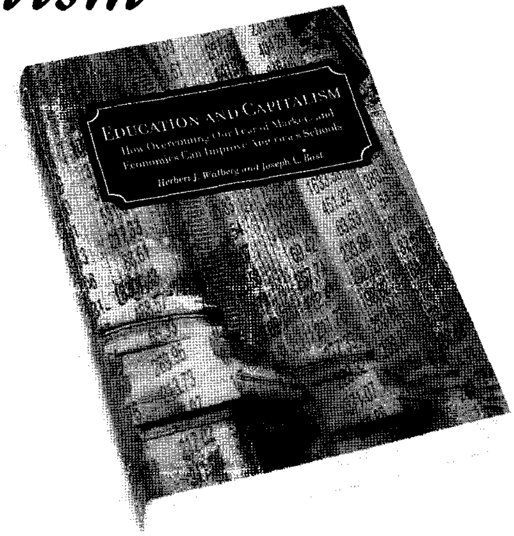
Education and Capitalism

How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools

One copy **FREE** to principals of charter, parochial, and independent schools who submit a request on letterhead.

"Walberg and Bast have written a scholarly, readable, and timely book that cogently explains how market competition can promote school improvement. I recommend it as a college-level text in economics, education or public policy, and to anyone who cares about the education of our children."

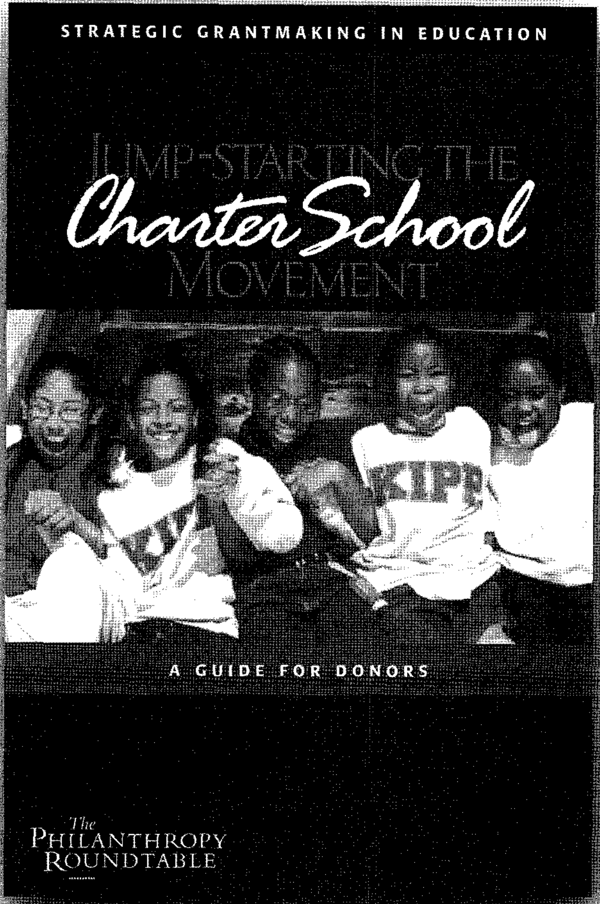
JOSEPH P. VITERITTI, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY


EDUCATION AND CAPITALISM
How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools
Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast

Order Your Copy Today!

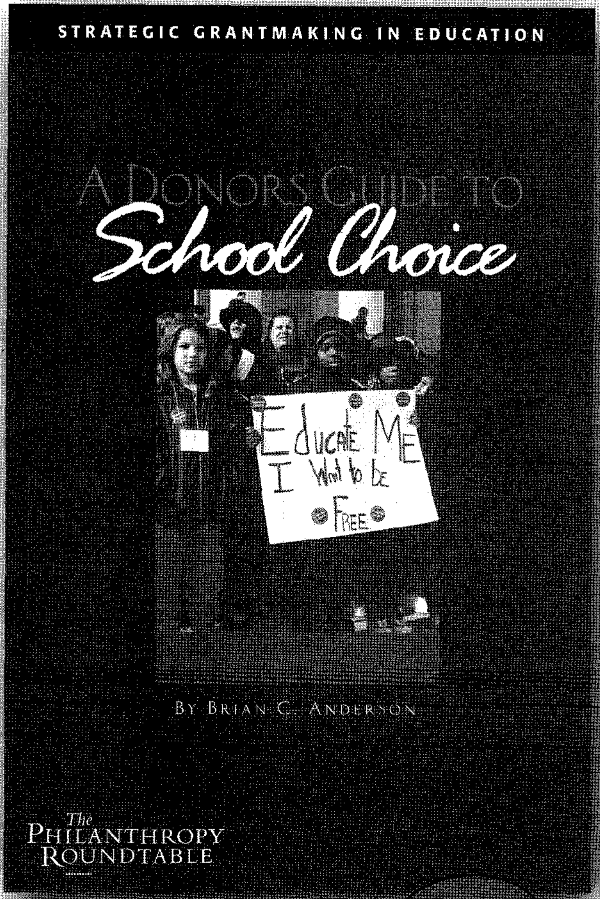
Fax us your request on letterhead to 312.377.5000
or write The Heartland Institute at
19 S. LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603
These and other great books are also available for purchase on our Web site. Visit **www.heartland.org**.

STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING IN *Education*


STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING IN EDUCATION
JUMP-STARTING THE Charter School MOVEMENT
KIPP
A GUIDE FOR DONORS
The PHILANTHROPY ROUNDTABLE

Jump-starting the Charter School Movement: A Guide for Donors

The Roundtable commissioned this guide in order to provide donors of all shapes and sizes with strategic ways to support a strong charter school movement in their communities and across the nation. This book draws on the experience of the most active and effective charter funders.


STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING IN EDUCATION
A DONOR'S GUIDE TO School Choice
Educate ME
I Want to be
FREE
BY BRIAN C. ANDERSON
The PHILANTHROPY ROUNDTABLE

NEW

A Donor's Guide to School Choice
By Brian C. Anderson

Several powerful tools for change fall under the term "school choice:" private scholarships, charter schools, tax credits, and vouchers. This guide provides a road map to all these options, with advice from veteran donors on the pros and cons of each. Invaluable for any donor seeking to improve all schools and to help low-income children attend high-quality schools.

These definitive guides are available free to qualified donors.

The Entrepreneurs and the New Commission

Changing Minds in the Education Establishment

It's not that the latest commission said anything much that was actually "new," despite its name. The entrepreneurs participating in this issue's forum have been talking about—and doing—much of what it recommends for more than a decade. Yet *Tough Choices, Tough Times*, the report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, is remarkable all the same, if only for the signatures appended to the report.

The names are among the most prominent in the country's centrist educational establishment—two former U. S. Secretaries of Education (one a Republican, the other a Democrat), a former governor, school superintendents (including New York's Joel Klein and Boston's Tom Payzant), a state superintendent, two former labor leaders, and a variety of distinguished business and community leaders. The most aggressive proponents of school reform—Jeb Bush, Bill Bennett, Alan Bersin, and Tommy Thompson, for example—are notably absent. Also missing from the action are leading innovators and entrepreneurs. The dollars for the project came from the Gates, Hewlitt, Casey, and Lumina foundations, all unlikely participants in a right-wing conspiracy.

The commission proves itself "New" after all. In its most surprising passage, it calls for a nation of charter schools.

Given the New Commission's sponsorship and composition, one could expect to read, in the great tradition of education commissions of the past, stirring words about the need for reform followed by tired platitudes about the need for greater co-operation. The stirring words are there, to be sure. America's schools are stagnating while the rest of the world quietly passes them by, the New Commission says.

But, then, the commission proves itself "New" after all. In its most surprising passage, it calls for a nation of charter schools. Though the word "charter" is scrupulously avoided, the report says the role of school boards needs to be cut back sharply. Instead, independent contractors are to receive equal per-pupil funding (with extra for the disadvantaged) to operate schools of choice under state supervision. That looks, talks, and walks like an charter school system to me.

Charters are just the first step. The New Commission also calls for dramatic reform of the teaching profession. State certification regulations are to open up paths to teaching and put the emphasis on classroom performance. The teachers of the future are to be paid according to effectiveness ("merit pay"), the situation at their school ("battle pay"), and their skill sets (extra for math, science, and special education teachers).

Still more. Students are expected to pass substantive examinations, if they are to receive a high school diploma. Those exams will directly open the door to colleges and universities.

When so much is so well said, one hates to carp at a few lapses of judgment. But one does wonder why the New Commission felt a need to attack testing and accountability: "Our testing system rewards students who will be good at routine work, while not providing opportunities for students to display creative and innovative thinking." Certainly, students need to know how to read and calculate if their "innovative thinking" is going to amount to much.

And the New Commission proposes to set salaries at the state level, not at each charter school separately, a recommendation that will certainly give the whip hand to teacher unions that would be in a position to call statewide, perhaps nationwide, sick-ins, strikes, and slow-downs.

But if one cannot sign on to every detail, one must certainly applaud the most exciting education report of the 21st century. Congratulations to the commission—and also to all those entrepreneurs who have demonstrated in the small what is proposed here on a grand scale (see forum, page 46).

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K–12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

Teacher Certification

Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger's findings ("Photo Finish: Certification Doesn't Guarantee a Winner," *research*, Winter 2007), supported by other recent research (including my own), are persuasive in suggesting that certification requirements do little to create or identify effective teachers. The findings might have been strengthened if measures of teacher ability had been included in the analysis, because the alternatively certified teachers in the study, from Teach For America (TFA) and the NYC Teaching Fellows program, represent high-achieving students from the nation's elite universities. Thus one might interpret the finding of little difference between regularly certified teachers and their more pedigreed peers to show that teacher certification requirements compensate for greater intellect or better overall undergraduate academic preparation.

The wide variation in quality within groups should come as no surprise, though documenting it with sound research is helpful. What is unexpected, and of concern to those who believe recruiting better-quality undergraduates will improve teacher quality, is that by year three the TFA alumni aren't doing substantially better than their regularly certified counterparts.

This thoughtful research raises important policy questions. Can we do without certification requirements? This study doesn't answer that question. What we really want to know is how to create effective teachers. If, as the authors suggest, classroom experience and not certification is linked to effective teaching, we might consider moving teacher preparation programs toward a model of more K–12 classroom experience, and away from coursework.

LAURA M. DESIMONE
Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Education
Vanderbilt University

NYCTF
CERT
NON CERT

research

Photo Finish

Certification doesn't guarantee a winner

The July 2006 deadline came and went for states to comply with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate to have a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom. To meet the standard, teachers must have a bachelor's degree, be state-certified, and prove they know the subjects they teach, either by satisfying minimum course-taking requirements or passing a test in the subject they teach. But will compliance ensure that students learn more? Does state certification make teachers better at fostering student learning? It is now possible to provide some answers to these questions by exploring the relative effectiveness of recently hired New York City public school teachers who entered the profession through alternate routes. Using a large data set provided by the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE), we analyzed student test scores as well as information about the students, their teachers, classrooms, and schools. With this rich array of data, we compared the effectiveness of recently hired alternatively certified (AC) and uncertified teachers to that of their traditionally certified counterparts in improving student learning in math and reading during grades 4 through 8.

The results of our study of New York City public school teachers confirm a simple truth: some teachers are considerably better than others at helping students learn. For example, elementary-school students who have a teacher who performs in the top quartile of all elementary-school teachers learn 33 percent of a standard deviation more (substantially more) in math in a year than students who have a teacher who performs in the bottom quartile. Yet as we embrace this piece of conventional wisdom, we must discard another: the widespread sentiment that there are large differences in effectiveness between traditionally certified teachers and uncertified or alternatively certified teachers. The greatest potential for school districts to improve student achievement seems to rest not in regulating minimum qualifications for new teachers but in selectively retaining those teachers who are most effective during their first years of teaching.

New Routes to the Classroom

State laws were originally designed to regulate teacher quality by specifying minimum pre-service course-taking and exam performance. Reflecting these traditions, the majority of prospective public-school teachers have completed one or two years of full-time study in a university education program and passed exams such as the widely used PRAXIS tests to satisfy those requirements.

In the 1990s, that traditional system for regulating the flow into teaching began to break down. Faced with difficulties recruiting enough certified teachers, many school districts hired large numbers of uncertified teachers. When No Child Left Behind and state laws mandated a certified teacher in

BY THOMAS J. KANE, JONAH E. ROCKOFF, AND DOUGLAS O. STAIGER

www.educationnext.org   WINTER 2007 / EDUCATION NEXT 61

Thank you for featuring research on the fundamental role of teachers in the achievement of New York City's students in "Photo Finish." The Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department are committed to improving the quality of teaching for the benefit of all our students.

We agree that multiple pathways to certification can be effective at recruiting teachers who can improve student achievement. The conclusion, however, that "certification matters little" is not supported by the analysis presented. By using teachers' certification status when hired, rather than when providing instruction, the authors cannot assess the impact of certification on student achievement. Because of state requirements, all teachers hired without certification would have been on a pathway toward certification and many did become certified during the study period. In addition, because certification is required, it is virtually impossible to explore what would happen in its absence. For example, ill-prepared individuals who do not attempt to teach because certification is required, but who could become teachers if certification were not required, are not represented in the group labeled uncertified in the study.

The Board of Regents has always required teachers without certification to be making satisfactory progress toward certification in order to remain employed. Teachers receive "transitional" certificates that permit them to teach for up to three years provided they receive school-based mentoring and make satisfactory progress toward full certification. Similar requirements applied to individuals with temporary licenses prior to the elimination of that pathway. The preparation and induction of these individuals likely would be quite different if certification were not required.

JOHANNA DUNCAN-POITIER
Deputy Commissioner
New York State Education Department

Adequacy Studies

Jim Guthrie and Matthew Springer's article "Courtroom Alchemy" (*features*, Winter 2007) presents a mistaken analysis of education-funding adequacy studies. First, the authors dismiss the pressure schools face from the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which requires near-universal student proficiency less than seven years from now. The authors infer solely from cost data that states with currently higher test scores on exams such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) should not need significant new resources.

Second, the article provides a figure that displays the supposed differences in instructional personnel per 1,000 students across eight state studies to indicate a weakness in the overall professional judgment approach, which relies on the judgement of a panel of educators. The figure fails to account for several factors:

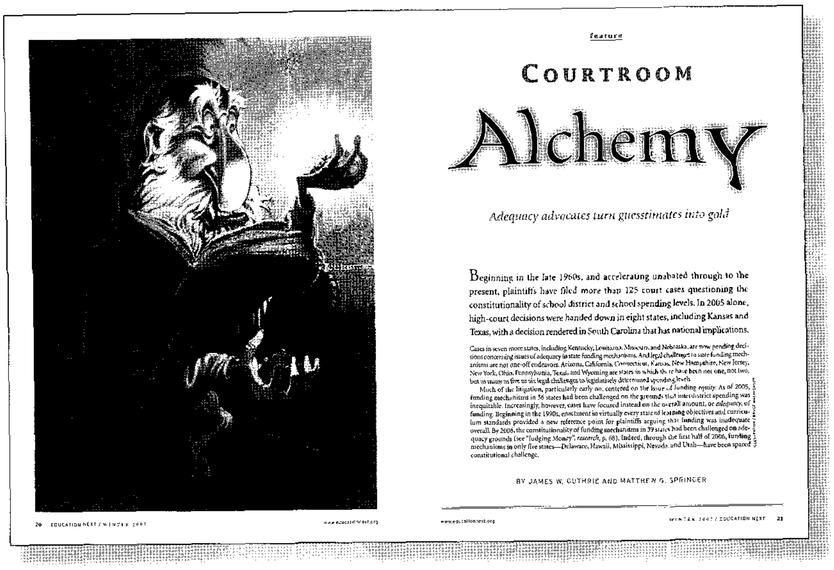
- Every state has its own unique accountability system with unique standards. The level of resources required to meet those standards necessarily differs as well.
- The panelists consulted in each state make different decisions about how resources should be deployed.
- These panelists make different tradeoffs regarding the personnel required to educate at-risk, English Language Learners (ELL), or special-education students. These tradeoffs can result in higher or lower staffing numbers for regular-education students.
- Differences in average school size across states can have an impact on the number of overall personnel that panels might identify.

Finally, the authors' analysis equates the validity of adequacy studies with a universal, one-size-fits-all answer to education funding. Such an easy answer does not exist. Instead, each state's unique circumstances, standards, history, demographics, and geography all argue for education policy decisions to remain within the state and local purview.

JOHN AUGENBLICK
Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc.

Guthrie and Springer respond:

John Augenblick proffers two arguments in support of his preferred method, professional judgment, for



feature

COURTROOM

Alchemy

Adequacy advocates turn guesstimates into gold

Beginning in the late 1960s, and accelerating unabated through to the present, plaintiffs have filed more than 125 court cases questioning the constitutionality of school district and school spending levels. In 2005 alone, high-court decisions were handed down in eight states, including Kansas and Texas, with a decision rendered in South Carolina that has national implications.

Cases in seven more states, including Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, and Nebraska, are now pending decisions concerning issues of adequacy in state funding mechanisms. And legal challenges to state funding mechanisms are not one-off endeavors. Arizona, California, Connecticut, Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wyoming are states in which there have been not one, not two, but as many as five or six legal challenges to legislatively determined spending levels.

Much of the litigation, particularly early on, centered on the issue of funding *equity*. As of 2005, funding mechanisms in 36 states had been challenged on the grounds that interdistrict spending was inequitable. Increasingly, however, cases have focused instead on the overall amount, or *adequacy*, of funding. Beginning in the 1990s, enactment in virtually every state of learning objectives and curriculum standards provided a new reference point for plaintiffs arguing that funding was inadequate overall. By 2006, the constitutionality of funding mechanisms in 39 states had been challenged on adequacy grounds (see "Judging Money", *research*, p. 68). Indeed, through the first half of 2006, funding mechanisms in only five states—Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi, Nevada, and Utah—have been spared constitutional challenge.

BY JAMES W. GUTHRIE AND MATTHEW G. SPRINGER

20 EDUCATION NEXT / WINTER 2007 www.educationnext.org

www.educationnext.org WINTER 2007 / EDUCATION NEXT 21

determining revenue levels presumed to provide an adequate educational opportunity. Regrettably, neither of his arguments addresses our principal criticism of professional judgment: the educator panels he routinely convenes employ no science in their estimates of needed revenues, but rather just guesses based on their experience and biases.

National Standards

Regarding the forum, "National Standards: Should the Federal Government Tell Schools What to Teach?" (Fall 2006), the greater the centralization of school decisions nationwide, the lower is the possibility of excellence in academic achievement. If there were a "single provider" of education policy decisions, the country would suffer a disastrous loss of competition. It would become an inevitable race to the bottom. The only effective education lobbyists would be the well-funded national ones, with their own narrow, intolerant agendas.

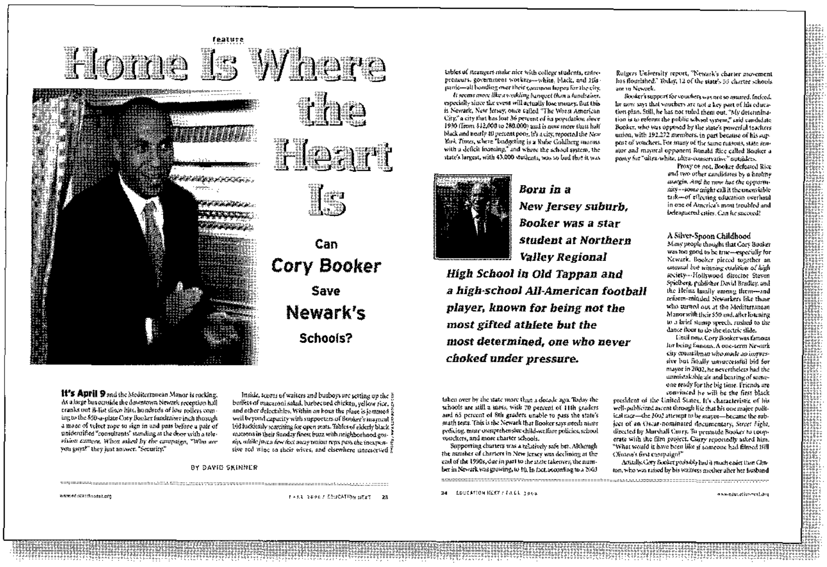
Consider what the federal government has already done to produce excellent education in the country. Nothing much. After billions of dollars and millions of words over decades of studies and programs, there is no definitive best teaching or learning method coming from the federal government. The slogan "No Child Left Behind" is a perfect example. It focuses on the bottom of the barrel, those who presumably are "left behind," perhaps 10 percent of the population. The other 90 percent of students and parents are by definition "left outside" the concerns of Washington's bureaucrats.

CARL OLSON
Founder
Textbook Trust

Restructuring Questions

Michael Petrilli ("The Cure: Will NCLB's Restructuring Wonder Drug Prove Meaningless?" *what next*, Fall 2006) shines a spotlight on a critical issue in the implementation of No Child Left Behind: the dearth of outside education providers ready to jump in to help states and districts deal with the increasing number of schools eligible for restructuring.

Contracting with for-profit and nonprofit school management organizations—or working with them to reopen failing schools as charter schools—could be a powerful "transplant" approach. However, two factors



feature

Home Is Where the Heart Is

Can Cory Booker Save Newark's Schools?

Born in a New Jersey suburb, Booker was a star student at Northern Valley Regional High School in Old Tappan and a high-school All-American football player, known for being not the most gifted athlete but the most determined, one who never choked under pressure.

BY DAVID SKINNER

restrict this solution. First, turning around existing schools is a far different business from creating them from scratch. Many organizations are wrestling with whether restructuring and conversion opportunities fit within their mission. Some nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) have been launched specifically to respond to this opportunity, including Education for Change, in Oakland; others, such as Mastery Charter Schools, in Philadelphia, partner with districts to extend their impact. Organizations must determine whether the opportunity presented by restructuring (which may involve free or low-cost facilities and other incentives from the district) is worth the loss of the autonomy and flexibility they believe are essential for improving student achievement.

Second, the demand for school management organizations exceeds supply for a reason. Most have chosen to grow slowly, to ensure consistently high-quality academic outcomes for students across their schools. NewSchools Venture Fund has supported nonprofit CMOs across the country—including nine that were not included in the article's graphic—and collectively run another 50 schools. In total, the 14 CMOs we support today have nearly 100 charter schools open this fall and expect to manage 175 schools by the 2008–09 school year. We believe that by taking a careful approach to scale, these charter school systems will have a greater impact on public education in the long term.

JULIE PETERSEN
Communications Manager
NewSchools Venture Fund

Spotlight on Newark

Your essay on Mayor Cory Booker's aspirations for change in the Newark Public Schools District ("Home Is Where the Heart Is," *features*, Fall 2006) was encouraging in one respect but discouraging in many others. It is extremely important to have a chief executive running our city who is clearly committed to helping all children achieve in school and reach for a higher standard of living. I, as superintendent of the district, and a veteran of 38 years, welcome Mayor Booker's voice, support, and leadership. On the other hand, it was disturbing to read a depiction of our schools as "still a mess."

While we have much more to do, there are several areas in which the district is improving. Over the last four years, in language arts our 4th-grade students improved from a passing rate of 52 percent to 70 percent, and in math for the same period, from 31 to 71.5 percent. From 1999 to 2005, high-school graduation rates increased from 45.7 to 75.9 percent. During the same period, the number of high-school students enrolled in AP classes quadrupled.

In 2004 and 2005, the Newark district received commendations for good management from the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) in Financial Reporting. We also received a Facilities Master Award for Excellence in the Facility Operations Program from ASBO for two consecutive years, making Newark the only district in the country to have achieved that distinction.

It is a disservice to our newly elected mayor to place the onus for "saving Newark schools" on one individual. It will require resources and a collaborative effort involving all students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other citizens to ensure that our children gain the necessary skills to thrive in their own community and to prepare them to compete globally.

Our district is *not a mess*. It would only seem so to one who has not taken the time to investigate.

MARION A. BOLDEN
Superintendent
Newark Public Schools

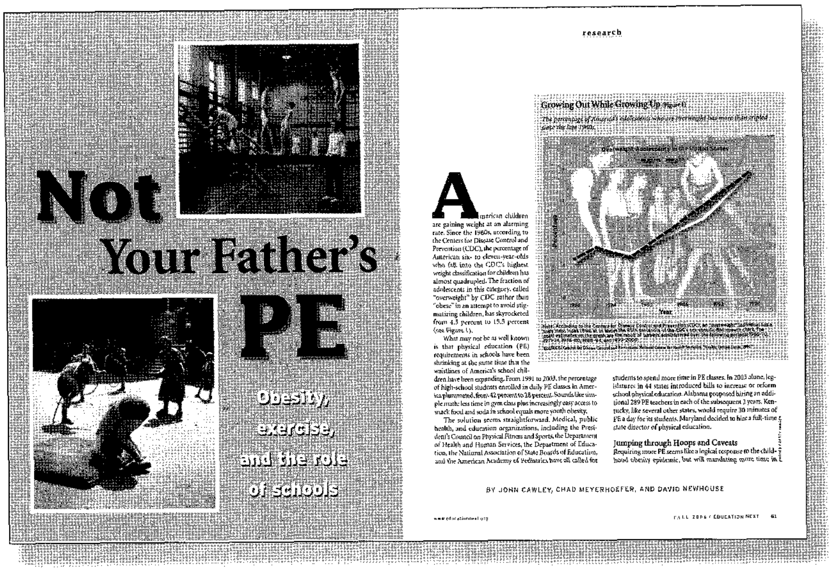
Kids and Exercise

Thanks to "Don't Sweat It" (*features*, Fall 2006) and "Not Your Father's PE" (*research*, Fall 2006), we now know that top-down solutions to child obesity offer minimal benefit. A "bottom-up" approach would be to change the way we fund schooling. We fund systems; we do not fund students. Because districts tend to add classrooms to existing structures as enrollment grows, we have large schools.

District consolidation also put us on the road to supersize schools. In 1931, there were 120,000 school districts. By 2000, there were fewer than 15,000. University of Chicago professor Christopher Berry ("School Inflation," *research*, Fall 2004) studied the period of greatest school-district consolidation, 1930–70. Berry found a consistent correlation of .70 between school size and district size, across states. Big districts have big schools.

How do big schools lead to inactive, overweight kids? To go to and from big, consolidated schools—often at remote sites—children wait for and sit in buses instead of walking or bicycling to a nearby school and playing in the schoolyard before and after the bell. High schoolers and middle schoolers are doubly afflicted: when they finally arrive at their very large schools, they find that the most popular sports are dominated by elite athletes. A glance at almost any high-school annual of the 1920s through the 1950s (before the final wave of consolidation) will reveal a lot of skinny young people, small senior classes, and wide participation in the major sports.

To go to and from big, consolidated schools—often at remote sites—children wait for and sit in buses instead of walking or bicycling to a nearby school and playing in the schoolyard before and after the bell.


Not Your Father's PE

Obesity, exercise, and the role of schools

research

BY JOHN CAWLEY, CHAD MEYERHOEFER, AND DAVID NEWHOUSE

Were we to fund students rather than systems, such schools—and skinny kids—would make a comeback.

Tom Shuford
Retired Public School Teacher
Lenoir, North Carolina

For combating kids' weight problems, K–12 dance education offers unique potential. Merging mind and body, dance education can contribute to students' intellectual growth in many academic subjects. Student dance making can offer some of what reading and writing offer—fantasy, storytelling, and performer-audience connection.

Dance is a way to cope with stress. In dances they make, kids can embody troubling ideas, hold them up to scrutiny, play with them, and, consequently, make them less threatening.

Kids need to get hooked on a physical activity in which they burn calories in physical education and that they can pursue outside of school. Breaking and krumping became popular on the streets, *Mad Hot Ballroom* engaged kids in and out of school, and *So You Think You Can Dance* drew huge audiences. Let kids make their own dances, compete, and find dances in their neighborhoods or on TV to demonstrate to classmates.

Judith Lynne Hanna
Senior Research Scholar
University of Maryland

Bob Cullen has done a fine job of identifying some of the challenges physical education teachers face. In "Don't Sweat It," Mr. Cullen implies that it is nearly impossible to have a permanent positive impact on the health and fitness of the students given the current graduation requirements for physical education, the attitudes of the kids and parents toward PE, social and cultural factors, the declining fitness levels of physical education teachers, and the low enthusiasm among teachers. Here in Miami-Dade Public Schools, we must add to this most difficult equation low family incomes, poor nutritional habits of students, extreme heat, no use of the indoor gymnasium, large classes, lack of adequate fountains for students to keep hydrated, and lack of classroom space.

Bennett Packman
Physical Education Teacher
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

CONGRATULATIONS

to the winners of the 2007 Thomas B. Fordham
Prizes for Excellence in Education

Winners of the Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship

Paul T. Hill

John and Marguerite Corbally Professor, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington; Director, Center on Reinventing Public Education

Abigail Thernstrom

Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute;
Vice-Chair, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Stephan Thernstrom

Winthrop Professor of History at Harvard University;
Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute

Winner of the Fordham Prize for Valor

Kati Haycock

Director and founder, The Education Trust

To read more about this year's prize winners,
visit ***www.edexcellence.net*** and click "Fordham Prizes."

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation • 1701 K St. NW Suite 1000 • Washington, DC 20006

THOMAS B. FORDHAM FOUNDATION
OUTSIDE THE BOX

the legal beat

Courts and Choice

Testing the constitutionality of charters and vouchers

BY JOSH DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

Teacher unions and allied opponents of school choice persist in searching for support in state constitutions, with mixed results. In Florida they won a victory early in 2006 when that state's supreme court struck down a voucher program on the grounds that the constitutional command of a "uniform ... system of free public schools" prohibited any alternative. A challenge to charter schools in Ohio went the other way in October, when a four-member majority of the supreme court ruled that the state's charter law, enacted in 1997, did not violate the constitution's decree that the General Assembly "secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state."

Attacks on Ohio's charters will focus henceforth on performance rather than constitutional principle.

We surmise that the different outcomes turned less on differences in constitutional language than on political differences between the courts. Florida's court has a Democratic majority, whereas Ohio's contained only one Democrat—a lame duck who protested that the charter law produces "a hodgepodge of uncommon schools financed by the state." One Ohio Republican wrote separately in dissent, and another dissented on procedural grounds, objecting that the trial judge had erred in bifurcating the suit into constitutional issues and others that alleged statutory violations in particular schools. The court decided only the constitutional questions.

Popularity may also have buttressed Ohio's charter program. Ohio has more than 300 charter schools, with 72,000 students. Five of the biggest cities—Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown—have charter enrollments of 16 to 28 percent of the student population, putting them among the top ranks of the country's charter-school cities. The voucher program that was invalidated in Florida enrolled barely 700 students. A second voucher program—Florida's McKay program for disabled students—is less vulnerable to attack because it is much bigger (17,000 students).

Rather than proceed with the second half of the suit, which rested on claims that charter schools had failed to comply with statutes and sponsorship contracts, their opponents withdrew it in December and instead appealed for regulatory help from a newly-elected Democratic governor and a legislature whose Republican majority had been reduced.

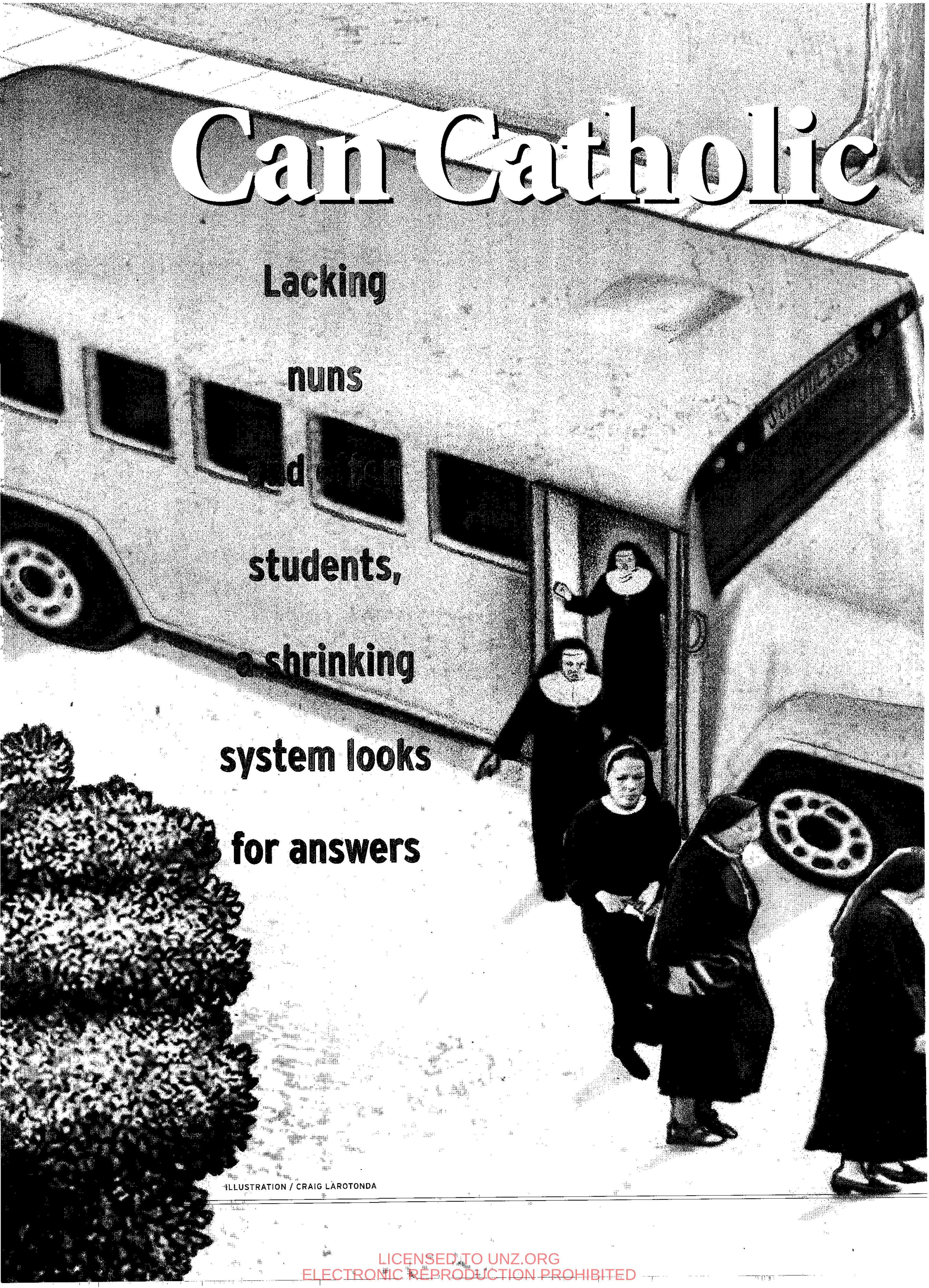
Litigation will continue nonetheless, because Ohio's unions have also filed a suit in federal court charging that the charter school law increases local districts' reliance on the local property tax, which increases inequalities in school funding, which leads to violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This argument is a modified reprise of the argument in the state.

State aid in Ohio depends on enrollments. Any student who is schooled elsewhere—at home, in a private school, in a charter school—"deprives" the local district of aid, but with charter enrollment the aid follows the student to the charter school. Plaintiffs claimed that this particular diversion of funds deprives school districts, poor urban ones especially, of the ability to provide a "thorough and efficient educational system." Though rejected by the majority, this argument resonated with a liberal Republican on the court, Paul Pfeifer. While conceding that the Ohio constitution does not prohibit charter schools, he cited the court's previous rulings in *DeRolph v. State*, Ohio's adequacy lawsuit, holding that the constitution does prohibit "excessive reliance on locally raised funds to finance public schools."

In Ohio, the long-running *DeRolph* suit is closed to further litigation, and in their federal suit, the unions will be going headlong against *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), in which the Supreme Court declined to invalidate educational inequalities resulting from reliance on the local property tax. Thus, the unions face the challenge of overturning more than 30 years of settled precedent before courts that are increasingly hesitant to tackle large-scale institutional reform.

Nonetheless, finding some way to overturn *Rodriguez* is a gleam in the collective eye of all those litigants who want to use courts both to increase school spending and to equalize it within states and even nationally. This is a liberal project for the long run, nurtured in state-level adequacy lawsuits and law school seminars. Project proponents can take comfort in the way Judge Pfeifer cast his dissent.

Josh Dunn is professor at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs. Martha Derthick is professor emeritus at the University of Virginia.



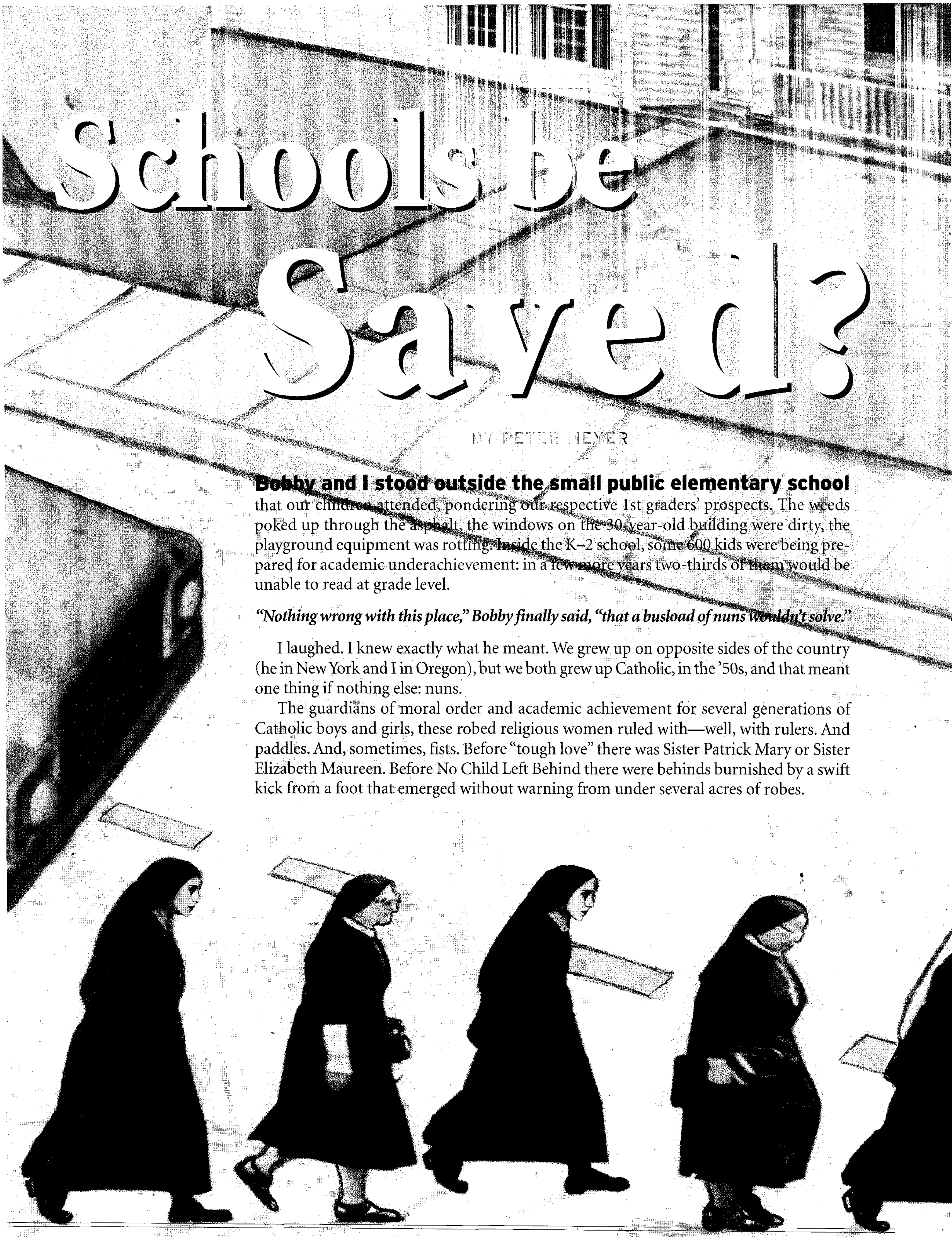
Can Catholic

Lacking nuns and often students, a shrinking system looks for answers

ILLUSTRATION / CRAIG LAROTONDA

Schools be Saved?

BY PETER MEYER



Bobby and I stood outside the small public elementary school that our children attended, pondering our respective 1st graders' prospects. The weeds poked up through the asphalt, the windows on the 30-year-old building were dirty, the playground equipment was rotting. Inside the K–2 school, some 600 kids were being prepared for academic underachievement: in a few more years two-thirds of them would be unable to read at grade level.

"Nothing wrong with this place," Bobby finally said, "that a busload of nuns wouldn't solve."

I laughed. I knew exactly what he meant. We grew up on opposite sides of the country (he in New York and I in Oregon), but we both grew up Catholic, in the '50s, and that meant one thing if nothing else: nuns.

The guardians of moral order and academic achievement for several generations of Catholic boys and girls, these robed religious women ruled with—well, with rulers. And paddles. And, sometimes, fists. Before "tough love" there was Sister Patrick Mary or Sister Elizabeth Maureen. Before No Child Left Behind there were behinds burnished by a swift kick from a foot that emerged without warning from under several acres of robes.

Indeed, our childhood memories, different in detail, were singular in their moral clarity: we knew what a busload of nuns could do. They would march up and down the aisles. (Yes, there would be aisles, in a room filled with 30 to 50 kids—phooey on class size.) And with a glance from behind their starched white wimples, we would learn.

The problem is that there no longer are busloads of nuns; in fact, most schools would be lucky to have a Mini Cooper's worth of such minimum-wage professional teachers. Their ranks have declined by a staggering 62 percent since 1965 (from 180,000 to 68,000). The staff composition of Catholic schools has similarly been turned on its head, from some 90 percent female religious in the '50s to less than 5 percent today (see Figure 1). "The school system had literally been built on their backs," reported Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee, and Peter Holland in their 1992 study *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, "through the services they contributed in the form of the very low salaries that they accepted." Consequently, costs have soared; average annual tuition has gone from next to nothing to more than $2,400 in elementary schools and almost $6,000 in high schools.

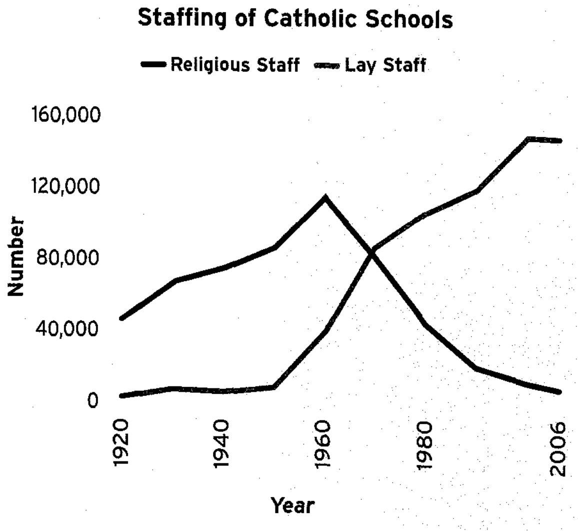
Despite a growing Catholic population (from 45 million in 1965 to almost 77 million today, making it the largest Christian denomination in the United States), Catholic school enrollment has plummeted, from 5.2 million students in nearly 13,000 schools in 1960 to 2.5 million in 9,000 schools in 1990. After a promising increase in the late 1990s, enrollment had by 2006 dropped to 2.3 million students in 7,500 schools. And the steep decline would have been even steeper if these sectarian schools had to rely on their own flock for enrollment: almost 14 percent of Catholic school enrollment is now non-Catholic, up from less than 3 percent in 1970 (see Figure 2). When Catholic schools educated 12 percent of all schoolchildren in the United States, in 1965, the proportion of Catholics in the general population was 24 percent. Catholics still make up about one-quarter of the American population, but their schools enroll less than 5 percent of all students (see Figure 3).

What happened to the Catholics? What happened to a school system that at one time educated one of every eight American children? And did it quite well.

Grammar counted. Posture counted. So did skirt length. It was all for the greater glory of God, of course. By reaching for God, the "all-knowing," so the nuns said, we might know something even if our reach fell short.

Losing Religion? (Figure 1)

The staff composition of Catholic schools has changed dramatically since 1920. Laypeople now comprise more than 95 percent of all Catholic-school employees.



SOURCE: National Catholic Educational Association

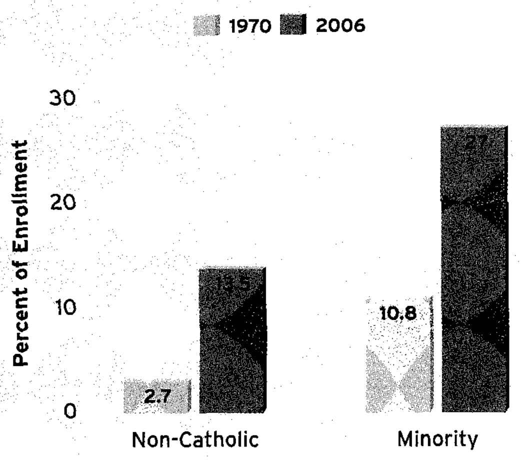
May I Have Your Attention, Please!

As most educators know, Catholic schools work and have worked for a long time. Sociologist James Coleman and colleagues Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore, in 1982, were among the first to document Catholic schools' academic successes, in *High School Achievement: Public and Private Schools*. A variety of studies since, by scholars at the University of Chicago, Northwestern, the Brookings Institution, and Harvard, have all supported the conclusion that Catholic schools do a better job educating children, especially the poor and minorities, than public schools.

According to the *Common Good* authors, Catholic high schools—and many believe that this applies to elementary schools as well—"manage simultaneously to achieve relatively

The New Face of Catholic Schools (Figure 2)

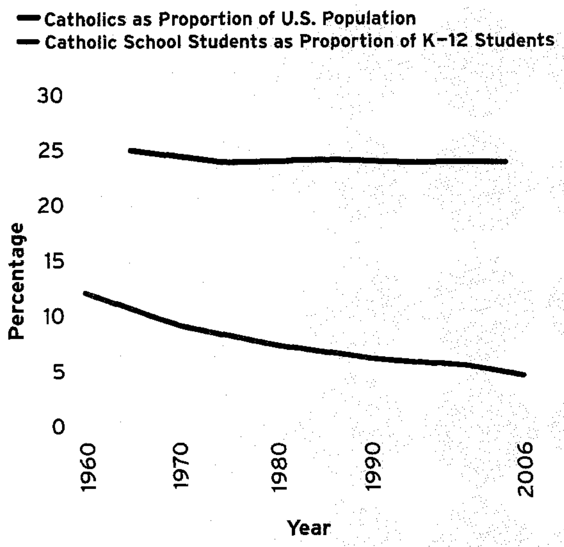
Students attending Catholic schools are now much more likely than in the past to be non-Catholic and more likely to be minority.



SOURCE: National Catholic Educational Association

Opting Out (Figure 3)

Since the 1960s, the Catholic flock has remained a steady quarter of the U.S. population, but the share of students attending Catholic schools has declined from 12 to 5 percent of the overall student population.



SOURCE: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; National Catholic Educational Association; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*

high levels of student learning, distribute this learning more equitably with regard to race and class than in the public sector, and sustain high levels of teacher commitment and student engagement." One of the keys, they concluded, is the organization of Catholic schools. Parochial schools are less likely to fall into the public-school habit of "structuring inequities": public schools offer students the chance to take weaker academic courses while Catholic school courses are "largely determined by the school." The irony, say Bryk et al., is that such a "constrained academic structure" contributes more to "the common school effect" than the potluck served by the public schools. Catholic schools give less weight to "background differences" of their students and thus do not allow those background differences to be "transformed into achievement differences." Even after adjusting for student background differences, Bryk and his colleagues found significant "school effects" on academic achievement.

"You know the story about the kid whose parents got fed up with their son's constant discipline problems in the public school?" asked James Goodness, communications director of Newark Catholic Schools, while entertaining journalists at a recent archdiocesan-sponsored luncheon. Newark, the tenth-largest parochial district in the country, closed nine elementary and two secondary schools in 2005, with a corresponding enrollment decline of 5 percent, from some 47,300 to 44,750 students. Goodness, with his story about the problem public-school boy, was explaining what made Catholic schools special. "'That's it!' says the dad. 'It's Catholic school for you.' They sent him. They waited. No calls from school. 'What's up?' the dad finally asks. 'The nuns been boxin' your ears?' 'No,' says the kid. 'They didn't have to. When I got to school, I saw this guy hanging from a cross with nails in his hands and feet and I figured they meant business.'"

What Catholic schools are very good at, it seems, is getting kids' attention. No surprise to those of us who grew up in them. The establishment of order and discipline, in all things: We wore uniforms. We had homework. We had to eat our lunch, even the peas and carrots. My wife remembers classmates having to put a nickel in the "mission box" if they mispronounced a word—"libary" instead of library or "pitcher" instead of picture—at her Jersey City parochial grade school. Grammar counted. Posture counted. So did skirt length. It was all for the greater glory of God, of course. By reaching for God, the "all-knowing," so the nuns said, we might know *some*thing even if our reach fell short. There were no prizes for just showing up. All of it, we knew, on some preternatural level, made us "better." And the research seems to support that view. In fact, one of the "surprises" for the *Common Good* researchers, who deemed Catholic schools' academic focus both consistent and laudable, was that the schools seemed to succeed even when the teaching and the curriculum were "ordinary."

Such Catholic rigor was part missionary zeal—to spread "the word"—and part defense against the encroachments of an increasingly secular world. And secular, for Catholics, meant a certain slackness in moral and academic discipline.

Parishes, and their schools, feel change at the local, neighborhood level quite quickly. But it takes time for the huge, theologically monolithic, and institutionally undemocratic Church to react.

In the United States, the so-called "wall of separation" between church and state, between order and freedom, eventually forced Catholics to build their own school system, the only country in the world where they have one (see sidebar, page 17). The battles to safeguard order, and academic excellence, were fought early and often. At the turn of the 20th century, for example, Catholic school leaders refused to follow their public school counterparts into a vocational and utilitarian tracking system. "Catholic youth should *not* be the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,' but should be prepared for the professions or mercantile pursuits," went one early protestation by the Association of Catholic Colleges.

Catholic schools toyed with progressive education models in the 1970s, but gave it up, report the authors of the *Common Good*, when they realized they could not be all things to all children. Catholic high schools soon "returned to conventional class-period organization, heightened academic standards and a renewed emphasis on a core of academic subjects."

Everything but a Plague of Locusts

So, if they are so good, why are Catholic schools disappearing? And if there are so many more Catholics, why are there fewer schools? No more nuns? No more money? Charter schools? Loss of faith? Indolence? Scandal? Irrelevance? The answer seems to be all of that—and less.

"The answer is fairly simple," says James Cultrara, director for education for the New York State Catholic Conference. "The rising cost of providing a Catholic education has made it more difficult for parents to meet those rising costs."

The Catholic-school story has been covered, as education journalist Samuel Freedman wrote in the *New York Times*, "as either a sob story or a sort of natural disaster, the inevitable outcome of demographics." But Freedman believes that "there need not have been anything inevitable about the closings," especially since Catholic populations are increasing.

Brooklyn closed 26 elementary schools in 2005, even though its Catholic population has grown by some 600,000 since 1950. "But the other trends were unmistakable," says Thomas Chadzutko, superintendent of the diocese's schools, and the man who presided over the closings. "Enrollment was down and expenses up."

If only it were that simple.

The loss of nuns has undoubtedly added to the financial burden. But demographic change, and the failure to respond to it, has created other burdens. Since the Catholic school "system" is actually a loose and quite decentralized confederation of 7,500 schools supported, for the most part, by 19,000 parishes in more than 150 dioceses, it took "the Church" *some* time to see the trends, much less develop new strategies to respond to them.

"We have a system of schools, not a school system," explains Newark's new vicar for education, Father Kevin Hanbury. "The local parishes traditionally have been responsible for the schools." Those parishes, and their schools, feel change at the local, neighborhood level quite quickly. But it takes time for the huge, theologically monolithic, and institutionally undemocratic Church to react.

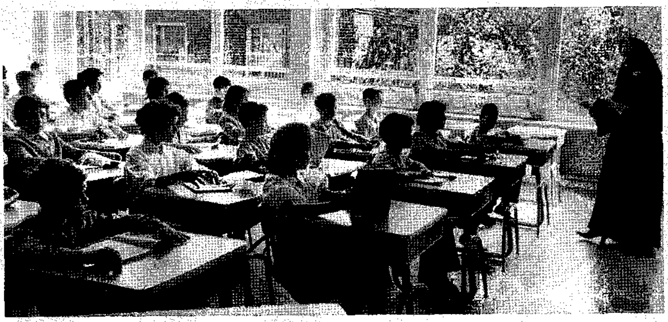
The flight from inner cities to the suburbs by working- and middle-class Americans affected Catholic schools as much as, if not more than, it did public schools. Downtown churches were suddenly filled by poor immigrants from Catholic nations (Latin America and the Caribbean) without a tradition of Catholic schools, much less a habit of paying for them. According to the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), between 2000 and 2006, nearly 600 Catholic elementary and secondary schools closed, a 7 percent decline, and nearly 290,000 students left, almost 11 percent. The largest declines were among elementary schools in 12 urban dioceses (New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Brooklyn, Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Boston, Newark, Detroit, and Miami), which together have lost almost 20 percent of their students (more than 136,000) in the last five years.

One factor is that the public schools in the suburbs are not like the public schools that Catholics tried to avoid in the cities.

Catholic School History Lesson

Spanish and French colonists brought schools (which were Catholic) with them to the New World in the 1600s. There were parochial primary schools in Pennsylvania in the 1700s. The first "female academy" in America was in New Orleans, established by the Ursuline Sisters from France in 1727.

Catholic schools in those days were often supported by public funds. St. Peter's in New York City applied for and received state aid in 1806, as did St. Patrick's in 1816. Catholic schools continued to receive public monies in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Connecticut, and New Jersey almost to the end of the 19th century. New York State did not outlaw the practice until 1898.



Catholics perceived "public school" as not just a threat to Catholics, but, as the 1917 *Catholic Encyclopedia* (CE) recounts, an "imminent danger to faith and morals." And in that threat was born the modern Catholic school system, as Catholic bishops convened in Baltimore in 1884 and ordered each parish to build a school and each Catholic kid to enroll. Between 1880 and 1900, as the immigrants began arriving, the number of students in Catholic schools more than doubled.

"The vastness of the system," the CE reported at the turn of the 20th century, "may be gauged by the fact that it comprises over 20,000 teachers, over 1,000,000 pupils, represents $100,000,000 worth of property; and costs over $15,000,000 annually." The Church saw its "missionary" duty to educate the new immigrants and in 1910, Catholics counted 293 Polish, 161 French, and 48 Italian schools, and a smattering of Slovak and Lithuanian schools. But the "vastness" now represented such a threat to the secular system that some considered Catholic schools "a destroyer of American Patriotism," and John Dewey pronounced the church "inimical to democracy." Many states simply outlawed Catholic schools. It took a Supreme court decision, in 1925, *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters*, to declare unconstitutional an Oregon law that required *public school* attendance. The Catholic "system" continued to grow and by 1965, a stunning 12 percent of all elementary and secondary students in the United States were enrolled in Catholic schools.

Then came sex, drugs, rock 'n roll—and Vatican II. The conclave of the world's Catholic bishops and cardinals called to order in 1962 by a cherubic old pontiff, John XXIII, turned the Church on its head at a time when the Beatles, Martin Luther King, and the Weather Underground were shaking civil and social foundations to their core. Swept away were the Latin Mass, the Baltimore Catechism, meatless Fridays, the high priest at an altar with his back to his congregation.

Not only are the nuns and priests now gone, but so too is a Catholic culture that for 100 years produced nuns and priests with faithful regularity. Of course, the debate as to whether the demise of Catholic didacticism and marshal order has been good or bad still roils Church waters. But the fact remains that the American Catholic school system isn't what it used to be.

—Peter Meyer

"Folks got to the suburbs and discovered that it was not only very expensive to build new schools, but that the public schools were not that bad," says Patrick Wolf, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas.

And charter schools, says Father Ronald Nuzzi, director of the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) leadership program at Notre Dame, "are one of the biggest threats to Catholic schools in the inner city, hands down. How do you compete with an alternative that doesn't cost anything?"

Ron Zimmer, of the RAND Corporation, and two colleagues studied the impact of charters in Michigan, one of the most chartered states in the nation, and determined that private schools were taking as big a hit as traditional public schools because of charters. "Private schools will lose one student for every three students gained in the charter schools," they wrote. This had, they said, "not only…a statistically significant effect on private schools but an effect that is economically meaningful."

And then came the sex abuse scandals. There has been nothing quite so shattering as the endless parade of headlines about priests abusing children. The Louisville Archdiocese was hit with almost 200 sex abuse suits in a single six-month period in 2003. In April of that year, the Boston Archdiocese revealed that it carried a $46 million deficit, "the largest any diocese has ever had," according to the *New York Times*, because it had paid out more than $150 million in legal settlements in sex abuse cases. The crisis in Boston was heightened, said Cardinal Sean O'Malley, because parish donations fell off by several million dollars as a result of the scandal. The diocese closed more than 60 parishes, and dozens of parish schools. A Gallup survey in 2003 found that one in four Catholics withheld donations to the Church because of the scandal. Four dioceses, of the 195 administrative units in the American Catholic church—Davenport, Iowa; Portland, Oregon; Spokane, Washington; and Tucson, Arizona—have already declared bankruptcy because of lawsuits over sex abuse. Others, like Boston, are on the brink.

Catholic schools "will have to become expert fundraisers to survive."
And marketers. And promoters. And lobbyists.
And miracle workers.

Marketing for Miracles

"The world changed" was a common refrain of Catholic educators with whom I spoke over several months of research. And it was clear that they included the Catholic world in that assessment. Faith, on many levels, has been shaken. The "new reality," says Samuel Freedman of the *Times*, is that Catholic schools "will have to become expert fundraisers to survive." And marketers. And promoters. And lobbyists. And miracle workers. Catholics are scrambling to find their footing in a world of charters, vouchers, and tax credits.

The Brooklyn diocese has hired a marketing firm. In Newark one of the first things Father Kevin Hanbury did when he was made vicar of education last year, before he hired a full-time marketing director, was host a white linen luncheon for the local media. "We have a story to tell," says Hanbury, "and we want to get it as close to page 1 as we can." The story, as Hanbury and other Catholic leaders tell it, is that Catholic schools not only work, but they are good for America. "Many of our schools are majority non-Catholic," says Karen Ristau, president of the NCEA. Ristau herself, a laywoman, represents a new, and some would say sobered, Church. She has an armful of academic credentials, but is also a grandmother. "We have high expectations for these little kiddos," she says, speaking of the 2-million-plus children in the Catholic school system that NCEA represents.

After I called the Memphis diocese to inquire about Catholic schools there, a FEDEX truck was at my door the next morning, with a package of press clips, brochures, and a CD. "Let me tell you this story," says a soft-spoken Mary McDonald, superintendent of Memphis Catholic Schools, also a grandmother. Though McDonald can now describe her first days on the job as superintendent in July of 1998 with some bemusement, when she received orders from her new boss, Bishop J. Terry Steib, to reopen *already closed* Catholic schools in downtown Memphis, she thought she'd been sent to hell.

Memphis was a sprawling Catholic diocese that had seen the number of its faithful increase by half, but its school enrollment decrease by almost a quarter. While there were new Catholic schools and Catholic schools with waiting lists in the suburbs, inner-city Memphis had become increasingly black and poor and non-Catholic. A half-dozen Catholic schools had closed over the previous two decades. The few schools that remained were in the death grip of aging parish populations, increased costs (the number of nuns in Memphis had dropped from 160 to 80), and dwindling enrollment.

No wonder "the Bishop's vision," as she calls it, sent McDonald right to the diocesan chapel and onto her knees. It didn't seem to matter to Bishop Steib that McDonald, a teacher and school principal during her 30 years in education, had never been a superintendent. "It was daunting," she recalls. "I just went out and started talking to anyone who would listen—and even those who didn't want to—about the value of and need for Catholic schools." And it didn't matter that the people in those slums where the empty schools were weren't Catholic, says McDonald, who often quotes a line attributed to Cardinal James Hickey of Washington, D.C., which has become a call to arms in the new crusade to save Catholic education: "We don't educate these children because *they* are Catholic, but because *we* are Catholic."

A year after McDonald started beating the bushes of Memphis for money, on a July day in 1999, her phone rang. The call was from someone offering "a multimillion-dollar donation," says McDonald, who told the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* at the time, "I know a miracle when I see one." Though the donors—there were more than one—remain anonymous to this day, their $15 million "was earmarked for Catholic education," says McDonald, recounting the story seven years later, as if she still can't believe it. "And they weren't even Catholic."

McDonald and her staff reopened St. Augustine, a 65-year-old school that had closed in 1995, within three weeks of receiving the donation. McDonald had 20 students registered in three days. The school opened with 30 students in two kindergarten classes. The students didn't need to have the $2,400 tuition—the donation paid for scholarships—and they didn't need to be Catholic.

"But the schools are truly Catholic," says McDonald. "We're not a public school. We're not a charter. We have the same values we've had for centuries—do the same things. We say prayer every day. We say the rosary at the same time every week. We have Mass for everyone." And uniforms, of course. "Our donors believed that Catholic education could make a difference," says McDonald, "and that Catholic schools are successful in inner cities." Within the next six years, eight more schools reopened, adding more than 1,300 students to the Jubilee School system, the name of the new initiative. Almost 90 percent of the students lived at or below the poverty level; over 80 percent were non-Catholic.

Has all the change and consolidation affected academics? No, says McDonald. Jubilee students are reading at grade level within a year of arriving; they are then outperforming their peers on standardized TerraNova tests. So far, none of the Jubilee students are old enough to have entered high school, but McDonald is optimistic. "We have a 99.9 percent graduation rate in our six high schools. Virtually no one drops out."

Capital Campaigns and a Voucher in Every Pot

A half-dozen years earlier in Washington, D.C., Cardinal Hickey had appointed a commission to study the problems confronting his diocese's inner-city schools. "The commission recommended closing 12 of 16 struggling schools," recalls Juana Brown, who was then the principal of one of those schools, Sacred Heart. Hickey issued his now-famous dictum: "Closing schools is not an option." He ordered the group back to the drawing board.

When it returned, Hickey's commission proposed creation of Faith in the City, an outreach and fundraising initiative that included a Center City Consortium (CCC). The task for CCC was solving the mystery of the less-than-holy trinity of modern Catholic education: financial distress, declining enrollment, and falling test scores.

Vouchers are proving to be something of an antidote to the threat posed by charter schools. In Milwaukee, for example, while charters have "accelerated" the decline of private schools, vouchers seem to have "stabilized" them.

This was the same mystery, on a smaller scale, that Mary McDonald was tackling in Memphis. Though details differed, the "can't fail" spirit has marked both enterprises and made them models for Catholic school rescue and reform.

"I tried to get people to look at Memphis," recalls George Loney, who directed Dayton's Catholic Urban Presence program, launched in 2002 to find a solution to that city's Catholic school crisis. Loney did help Dayton's Catholic schools, part of the Cincinnati Archdiocese, achieve "needed economies of scale" by consolidating. And test results are good. "I just can't get them to publicize them," he says.

The D.C. archdiocese announced in December of 2006 that it would close—"we prefer to say consolidate," says communications director Susan Gibbs—three elementary schools in the District. Yet the CCC schools seem to be working. Martin Davis of the Fordham Foundation writes that the 13 consortium schools achieved "remarkable growth" in grades 2 through 8 proficiency rates on the TerraNova from 2000 to 2005. "More remarkable," writes Davis, "those growth rates include test scores from 2004–05, when 300 high-poverty children from failing District of Columbia public schools entered consortium schools through the new D.C. voucher program."

In fact, vouchers are proving to be something of an antidote to the threat posed by charter schools. In Milwaukee, for example, according to Paul Peterson, while charters have "accelerated" the decline of private schools, vouchers seem to have "stabilized" them. Catholic schools in the city have been, since 1996, among the many private schools to benefit from the first state-supported voucher program. In

2005, each of the some 14,000 vouchers passed out in Milwaukee was worth $5,943 at any one of 117 eligible schools, 35 of them Catholic. (The 45 charters in the city, allowed since 1993, received between $7,000 and $9,000 per student.) The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* concluded in 2005 that "the principal effect of choice" in the city has been "to preserve the city's private schools, many of them Lutheran and Catholic."

David Prothero, associate superintendent of schools for the archdiocese, says the 6,000 Catholic-school voucher students represent nearly half of Milwaukee's Catholic school students. "That's significant."

"The irony is that the research shows that private schools don't make a big difference for high socioeconomic students," says Patrick Wolf, author of a recent study on voucher impacts in Washington, DC. "But they do make a difference for low-income students. And they're the ones who can't afford them."

"From a lawmaker's point of view," says Jim Cultrara, who is also co-chairman of the New York State Coalition of Independent and Religious Schools and spearheaded a serious, though unsuccessful, effort to have the New York State Legislature pass a tax credit in 2006, "it's fiscally prudent to provide financial assistance to enroll children in independent and religious schools. It helps reduce the tax burden and alleviate overcrowding in public schools. And that's not even counting the benefit of providing students with a quality education."

Thus, the significance of the scholarship programs and vouchers, and the Church's mission to the poor. The latest NCEA data show the mean tuition and per-pupil cost for Catholic elementary schools to be $2,607 and $4,268, and for high schools, $5,870 and $7,200, all below average public-school per-pupil expenditures. Thus, too, the persuasiveness of the argument that Catholic schools are a form of subsidy to the nation's public education system. Diane Ravitch wrote, in a *Daily News* editorial after hearing word of the Brooklyn diocese school closings in 2005, "It will be a loss for all New York City. The Catholic schools in this city have provided genuine choice for children from low-income and working-class families for more than 150 years. What is more, they have established a solid reputation for safety, academic standards and moral values. All of this has been supplied at a nominal cost to families and at no cost to taxpayers." The NCEA estimates the value of the Catholic school system's annual subsidy to the nation at $19.4 billion.

"The Catholic schools in New York City have provided genuine choice for children from low-income and working-class families for more than 150 years. What is more, they have established a solid reputation for safety, academic standards and moral values."

Through smart financial administration and management and aggressive fundraising, many dioceses are beginning to take back some ground lost in the last several decades. Pooling resources for such things as collecting tuition, custodial contracts, and paying salaries has saved money as well as freed principals to focus on academics. Through aggressive marketing and with a corporate board of "the rich and powerful," the D.C. consortium has raised $30 million in a capital campaign in the last five years. An annual gala fundraiser, co-sponsored by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Representative John Boehner (R-OH), last year garnered $1 million.

"Mr. Boehner has visited every one of our schools," says Brown. "He's 1 of 11 children and grew up Catholic and has been a tremendous booster."

It is probably no coincidence that Kennedy and Boehner were key Capitol Hill strategists in passing the historic No Child Left Behind Act. "Catholics believed in every child learning long before NCLB," says Juana Brown. "We have a mission to educate."

The dust has still not settled in the Church. But the new missionaries, like Brown and McDonald, seem as holy and determined as their habited predecessors. Given the Church's history, one would not want to bet against them, especially on the education front. Can tax credits, vouchers, and fundraisers substitute for the devotions of the faithful? Can marketing directors get those same faithful to forget about the sexual predators? These are serious and still largely unanswered questions. But there is a more vexing concern for some of us, even those of us used to imponderables such as the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin: where do you find a busload of nuns?

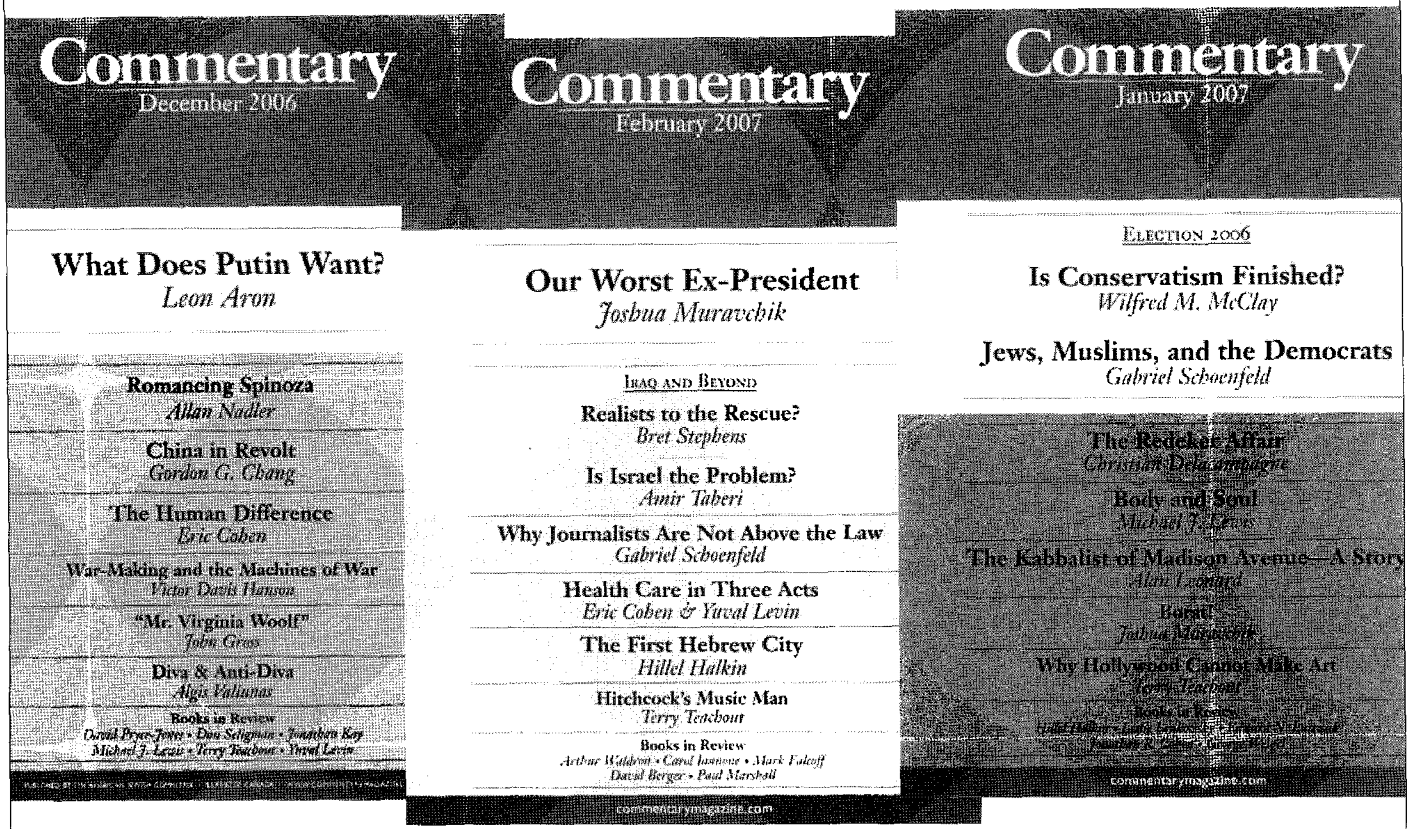
Peter Meyer, former news editor of Life *magazine, is a freelance writer.*

We've changed our look, and we want you to be among the first to know about it.

COMMENTARY's website has taken a step forward. New features have been added, including a weblog, `contentions` (go to *www.commentarymagazine.com/contentions)*, with more to come soon.

COMMENTARY's online presence is now livelier, easier to use, more attractive, more searchable, and more interactive than ever before.

We're excited about our new look, and we hope you enjoy browsing and using the new *www.commentarymagazine.com*.



Commentary
December 2006

What Does Putin Want?
Leon Aron

Romancing Spinoza
Allan Nadler

China in Revolt
Gordon G. Chang

The Human Difference
Eric Cohen

War-Making and the Machines of War
Victor Davis Hanson

"Mr. Virginia Woolf"
John Gross

Diva & Anti-Diva
Algis Valiunas

Books in Review
David Pryce-Jones • Dan Seligman • Jonathan Kay
Michael J. Lewis • Terry Teachout • Yuval Levin

Commentary
February 2007

Our Worst Ex-President
Joshua Muravchik

IRAQ AND BEYOND

Realists to the Rescue?
Bret Stephens

Is Israel the Problem?
Amir Taheri

Why Journalists Are Not Above the Law
Gabriel Schoenfeld

Health Care in Three Acts
Eric Cohen & Yuval Levin

The First Hebrew City
Hillel Halkin

Hitchcock's Music Man
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Arthur Waldron • Carol Iannone • Mark Falcoff
David Berger • Paul Marshall

commentarymagazine.com

Commentary
January 2007

ELECTION 2006

Is Conservatism Finished?
Wilfred M. McClay

Jews, Muslims, and the Democrats
Gabriel Schoenfeld

The Redeker Affair
Christian Delacampagne

Body and Soul
Michael J. Lewis

The Kabbalist of Madison Avenue—A Story
Alan Leonard

Borat!
Joshua Muravchik

Why Hollywood Cannot Make Art
Terry Teachout

Books in Review

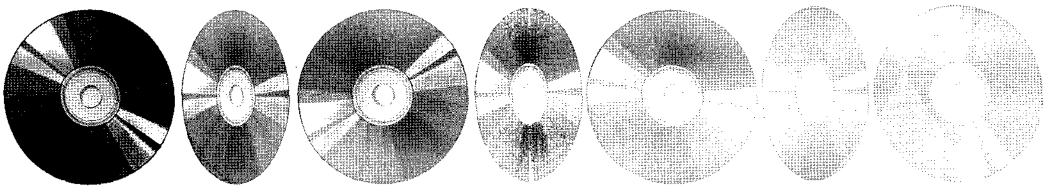
commentarymagazine.com

Commentary
commentarymagazine.com

THE GREATEST SOFTWARE ON EARTH
READING
LEVEL 2
SOFTWARE
SOFTWARE

Selling SOFTWARE

How vendors manipulate research and cheat students



When companies that sell instructional software used to come calling on Reid Lyon, expert on reading instruction and former advisor to President Bush, he played a little game. First, he listened politely to the sales reps' enthusiastic pitches and colorful demonstrations of how computer software can build reading skills in new ways. Then he asked to see their technical manuals.

"I always found nothing in there that would help the consumer determine if this stuff really works," said Lyon, who last year ended a 10-year stint as chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which sponsors studies on reading. Regarding software, Lyon said, he would "rarely see any data that I would consider credible." These encounters with software makers happened so often—three to four times a month in Lyon's experience—that he observed a pattern. "They always came in excited, and left very depressed."

Educational software makers may get rebuffed by authorities like Lyon, whose endorsements, companies believed, could lead to governmental stamps of approval, and thus explosive sales. But they usually get warmer receptions in the offices of the nation's school superintendents, who are, after all, their primary customers. The system was not supposed to work this way. President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) famously requires that any instructional materials supported by federal aid be proven to work through "scientifically based research." Unfortunately, scientific proof is defined in many ways. In the world of education software, definitions abound.

ILLUSTRATION / BILL CIGLIANO

BY TODD OPPENHEIMER

Separating the Sheep from the Goats (Figure 1)

Very few software packages have come close to demonstrating effectiveness. Much of the research also fails to meet the high standards of the What Works Clearinghouse.

Software	Non-Software
[illegible]	
DaisyQuest (BR) DaisyQuest for Preschool Children (ECE) FastForWord Language (ELL)* The Expert Mathematician (MSM)	Everyday Mathematics (ESM) Enhanced Proactive Reading (ELL) Arthur (ELL) Read Well (ELL) Reading Mastery / SRA / McGraw-Hill (ELL) Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs (ELL) Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language* Learners and Their Classmates (ELL) Phonological Awareness Training (ECE) Phonological Awareness Training plus Letter Knowledge Training (ECE) Sound Foundations (ECE)
[illegible]	
Fast ForWord Language (ELL)*	Enhanced Proactive Reading (ELL) Shared Book Reading (ECE) Saxon Elementary Math (ESM) Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley Elementary Mathematics (ESM) Read Naturally (ELL) Connected Mathematics Project (MSM) Houghton Mifflin Mathematics (ESM) Saxon Math (MSM)
No Study [illegible]	[illegible] **Standards**
Adventures of Jasper Woodbury Series (MSM) CompassLearning (MSM) Destination Math (MSM) PLATO Learning (MSM) Successmaker (MSM)	Algebra Project (MSM) Algebraic Thinking (MSM) Connecting Math Concepts (MSM) CORD Applied Math (MSM) Integrated Mathematics, Science, and Technology (MSM) Mathematics in Context (MSM) MATHThematics (MSM) Model Mathematics Program (MSM) Moving with Math (MSM) Partnership for Access to Higher Mathematics (MSM)

BR = Beginning Reading
ECE = Early Childhood Education
ELL = English Language Learners
ESM = Elementary School Mathematics
MSM = Middle School Mathematics

Note: The WWC has reviewed studies on two middle school software products (Cognitive Tutor and I CAN Learn Pre-Algebra and Algebra) and one early childhood non-software intervention (Dialog Reading) that meet its evidentiary standards, but has yet not issued an effectiveness rating for these interventions.

* FastForward Language earned a potentially positive rating for English language development, but had no discernable effect on reading achievement.

SOURCE: What Works Clearinghouse, U.S. Department of Education

Wrestling with Slippery Evidence

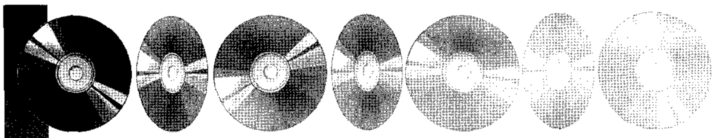
According to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the primary overseer of research within the Department of Education, "scientifically based research" fits the following criteria: It randomly assigns its test subjects to comparable groups; it yields reliable, measurable data; if the study makes any claims about what causes its effects, it "substantially eliminates plausible competing explanations"; its methods are clear enough that other researchers can repeat or extend them; and, finally, the study has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or equivalent panel of "independent experts."

But not everyone reads bulletins from the Department of Education, or interprets them the same way. Purveyors of education products of all kinds make claims that they're based on scientific proof, and thus "aligned" to federal requirements. A good many trot out studies, sometimes great numbers of them, that appear to have followed one or more steps that are hallmarks of gold standard scientific research. A select few software programs (such as Cognitive Tutor, an unusually sophisticated math program, and Fast ForWord, a language program) have gone through at least some careful vetting. But the vast majority fall somewhere along the other side of the scale. As Lyon puts it, claims "are based on any kind of document—whether it's an unpublished technical manual, an opinion piece, or an editorial. These people either don't understand the law's requirements, or they're trying to game the system."

Federal authorities were supposed to lend districts a helping evaluative hand. This was to be done primarily through a project funded by the IES called the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC). Created in 2002, the WWC gathered a team of top-flight research experts whose mission was to review studies done on a range of instructional packages—both traditional and electronic—and rate the quality of their achievement data (see Figure 1). After four years and an expenditure of $23 million, the WWC had evaluated studies on only 32 products. While the WWC itself earned good ratings for the rigor of its work, plenty of people were frustrated with how little was getting done—and how few studies met the agency's standards. After complaints mounted, the WWC sped up its work. By December 2006, it had reviews out on 51 products. To accomplish this, the WWC went through 255 studies. Still, the vast majority of studies (75 percent) did not meet the agency's scientific standards, even with some "reservations."

By this time, critics were calling the WWC "the Nothing Works Clearinghouse." The nickname carries an important double meaning. To some, it's another example of governmental blockheadedness—specifically, that understanding how teaching and learning work in the real world is beyond the skill of a federal agency. To others, including many leaders in the research community, the message is actually more harsh. It is that most new classroom gimmicks don't add much of value, and studies packaged to suggest otherwise are to be treated with great suspicion. In fairness, suspicious research sometimes contains perfectly innocent flaws. That's because truly scientific research is extremely difficult, time-consuming, and costly—and thus very rare—which is precisely why the WWC has found so few studies to be satisfactory.

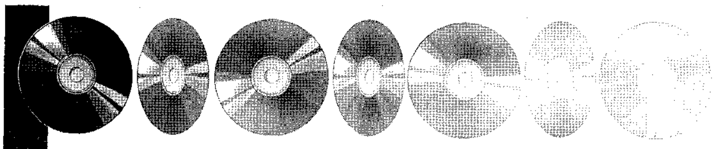
To compensate for the WWC's academic outlook and pace, many other organizations, both private and governmental, have developed their own evaluation systems to help schools navigate the dizzying array of curricular products on the market today. (These include a RAND Corporation resource, called the Promising Practices Network; the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, from American Institutes for Research; the Best Evidence Encyclopedia, out of Johns Hopkins University; and even a global survey called the International Campbell Collaboration.) While some offer useful information, their criteria and standards vary widely. And this may further confuse, or mislead, school purchasing agents.



Truly scientific research is extremely difficult, time-consuming, and costly—and thus very rare—which is precisely why the WWC has found so few studies to be satisfactory.

The IES has since 2003 been working on its own evaluation of educational software, through "gold standard" methods of scientific research. The ambitious $15 million study, due sometime early in 2007, has some peculiar characteristics. IES did not begin by selecting the most popular products, but instead asked software producers to volunteer; it then chose 15 products from among those that did. And while the evaluation methods of IES appear to have been exacting, the study will answer nothing more than the most general question: Does educational software, as a class, tend to work? The individual evaluations of the 15 packages will not be released.

This is odd for two reasons. First, the basic question about software's general effectiveness has long been answered: as a whole, it works no better than cheaper traditional materials. (Former North Carolina State professor Thomas Russell watched so many studies come to this conclusion over the years that he eventually compiled a book on the subject. Covering 355 different studies done since the early 1900s, the book was titled, aptly, *The No Significant Difference Phenomenon.*)



Software sales to schools have certainly been robust. According to Simba Information, a media analysis firm based in Stamford, Connecticut, the nation's K–12 schools bought $1.9 billion of electronic curricular products in 2006.

The more precise answer is, it depends on which software you're using, with what ages, and in what circumstances. But if you are a teacher or administrator trying to make a shopping decision, "this [study] isn't going to help you," admits the IES study's lead researcher, Mark Dynarski of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., in Princeton, New Jersey. "We're trying to help Congress, which is spending more than $700 million a year to support technology." As basic as the general answer may be to education insiders, Dynarski believes it will be news to policymakers. "If it is this difficult to know whether this stuff helps, why is everyone so anxious to know whether to purchase it?"

The second oddity to the IES arrangement is the bargain it struck. To be included in the study, companies had to donate software for 132 schools and teacher training. In return, they get two important gifts: a free study, complete with a federal stamp of approval, and the study's individual evaluations. Companies can package and spin those evaluations however they like, since no one besides IES will have those details. "I don't know what they will do with the data," Dynarski said.

All of which raises a very large and thorny question: What really does happen, on the ground, inside the schools, when research spin and marketing hype collide with desperate classrooms?

Money, Money Everywhere

Software sales to schools have certainly been robust. According to Simba Information, a media analysis firm based in Stamford, Connecticut, the nation's K–12 schools bought $1.9 billion of electronic curricular products in 2006. While that is less than a fourth of the instructional materials market as a whole, the electronic sector's growth has been vigorous—up 4.4 percent from 2005 to 2006, as compared with the 2.6 percent growth rate of the overall instructional products market.

Among the many electronic products that schools buy, the most visible have been those geared toward reading. Building up the nation's reading skills was of course the main impetus behind No Child Left Behind. Today, schools can pick from a cornucopia of federally funded initiatives in this domain. There is Reading First, which aims $1 billion a year at grades K–3; various funds for "supplemental" products; special programs to promote educational technology or "comprehensive school reform"; and numerous initiatives under Title I, the overarching federal fund for poor students.

This plethora of options—and money—has produced an abundance of new marketing opportunities for software companies. Strangely, one of the richest of those is NCLB's scientifically based research requirement. Conceived as a strict rule with clear methodological standards, it has instead become a versatile tool—a Cuisinart for raw statistics, ideal for marketing hustle and deception. It has not helped matters that, as with many laws, it is beyond the ability of those it affects most to understand its crucial details; nor did the law's creators endow it with any sort of enforcement system.

L.A.'s $50 Million Gamble

Consider the story of Waterford Early Reading, distributed by Pearson Digital Learning. Pearson is the nation's leading seller of educational software, and its Waterford program is used in 13,000 classrooms in all 50 states. The WWC has not yet evaluated Waterford, but it is one of the 15 products that IES has elected to study.

So what could be known about products like Waterford if government evaluators chose to look into and report on the daily experiences of teachers and students? One particular school district, Los Angeles Unified (LAUSD), has a long and remarkably troubled history with this product. In July of 2001, LAUSD decided to spend nearly $50 million on Waterford, instantly making itself the company's largest customer.

Waterford is designed for the earliest readers, students in grades K–2. It requires students to spend 15 to 30 minutes a day with various multimedia exercises, and costs $200 to $500 per student. In launching the program, Roy Romer, then LAUSD superintendent, said this "is like putting a turbocharger in a car engine. We are going to accelerate reading performance in Kindergarten and first grades."

Several years later, the district's own evaluation unit pronounced the program a failure. In a 2004 report, its second with negative findings, the evaluators said, "There were no statistically significant differences on reading assessments between students who were exposed to the courseware and comparable students who were not exposed to the courseware."

Some teachers found the program helpful, but many did not. Pearson and other supporters of the program argued that Waterford's effectiveness was compromised by the fact that teachers didn't fully use the product—and when they did, they often used it incorrectly. But L.A.'s last evaluation found that "neither the amount of usage nor the level of engagement had an impact on achievement."

The report, which did not make the news until early 2005, stunned L.A. school officials. Even Romer backtracked. "As I looked at this, it didn't provide as much bang for the buck as I would have liked," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. The district has since scaled back the Waterford program, using it as more of a sideline specifically for students with learning difficulties. (One problem was that Waterford was taking time away from students' primary literacy lessons, thereby causing actual declines in achievement.) Teachers and administrators both say sidelining Waterford has helped. But it also means that the district is getting a lot less for its $50 million than it planned on. School board members soon questioned the wisdom of the whole venture.

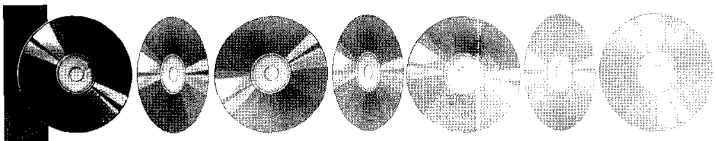
What happened here? And what lessons do Waterford's rise and partial fall in Los Angeles offer education policymakers, not only in other states but also in Washington?

Lesson One

The first lesson is to beware of seemingly persuasive numbers. Many curriculum producers started promoting their "scientific" research very soon after NCLB required it—an impossible feat, considering the many years it takes to conduct solid scientific studies.

How does questionable research get produced? In Waterford's case in Los Angeles, Julie Slayton, an analyst in LAUSD's Program Evaluation and Research Branch and one of the authors of the Waterford evaluations, says Pearson did not try to tilt the evaluators' basic data, "but they did their best to make the report come out favorably. They tried to make it focus on implementation instead of effectiveness." In other words, Pearson wanted the question to be about the district's wobbly use of Waterford—not whether the program itself inherently worked.

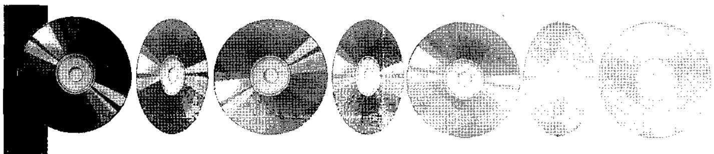
After failing to change the district's opinion, Pearson prepared a preliminary evaluation of its own—a "briefing packet" for Superintendent Romer, full of numbers indicating that Waterford was producing dramatic achievement gains. Ted Bartell, director of research for LAUSD, was not pleased. In a memorandum dated May 8, 2002, he urged Pearson to spell out "the methodological limitations" of its studies. Bartell argued that Pearson's sample sizes (60 students) were too small for solid conclusions to be drawn from them; that there was no evidence that Waterford and not other factors caused the gains; and that the gains were too small to be meaningful in any case, or to be representative of the district as a whole.



To the average administrator, the sensations of success or failure inside your own classrooms are going to feel a lot more relevant than abstract statistics drawn from schools on the other side of the country.

In the following months, Pearson continued to generate numbers indicating success, but the data drew from problematic sources. Some used the Academic Performance Index (API), which covers all grades in a school; this confounded the picture of K–2, where Waterford was used. Some involved the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), which is meant only for non-English speakers and tests advanced literacy skills that Waterford doesn't directly teach. Others drew from reading inventories created by Pearson itself. "They kept using gains and measures that are not relevant to their program," says Lorena Llosa, a former LAUSD research analyst who was completing a doctorate in applied linguistics that employs CELDT data.

In retrospect, Slayton says, "Pearson does an enormously aggressive job. They pressured us. They are in your face. They are obnoxious, and they don't go away. They are very, very good at giving people a show."



Accelerated Reader (AR) is used in more than half the nation's public schools. Renaissance holds massive annual conferences that feel like religious revival meetings. Testimonials include lengthy, seemingly solid studies proving AR's power. Yet none of these studies have held up to serious scrutiny.

Before Los Angeles invested in Waterford, there were plenty of signs that the program might not work quite as the company promised. For years, Pearson, like many companies, had been gathering studies that offered evidence of Waterford's effectiveness. But various independent evaluators had pointed out that the bulk of these studies have methodological problems (lack of control groups, small sample sizes, missing information, numbers based on subjective survey data, and so forth). "In light of these limitations," the LAUSD evaluators said in their first report, in 2002, "much of the information from these evaluations should be interpreted with caution."

Lesson Two

Why didn't Los Angeles officials do that? One reason is that researchers who evaluate classroom exercises and educators who work inside those classrooms represent two often conflicting cultures—this is lesson Number Two. As an illustration, when Ronni Ephraim, the district's chief instruction officer, was asked if she had looked at the research on Waterford before supporting its use in LAUSD, she said she had not, largely because it did not seem relevant. "Every classroom situation is different," she says. "And nothing compares to L.A. I'd rather listen to my own teachers." Ephraim's worldview is broadly shared. To the average administrator, the sensations of success or failure inside your own classrooms are going to feel a lot more relevant than abstract statistics drawn from schools on the other side of the country. Is it any wonder, then, that NCLB's scientific research requirements have been so widely ignored?

To researchers, however, Ephraim's way of thinking can make an instruction method look like it's working when it's not. All too often, some other environmental factor is driving the improvement; sometimes, in fact, the gains are just normal growth associated with getting older. For reassurance that none of this is the case, researchers commonly begin by looking for two facts in particular: first, studies of the program published in independent, refereed journals—ideally those of high repute; and second, the researchers' use of truly comparable groups.

So far, very few commercial programs meet these standards—although many claim they do. One such example is Renaissance Learning, Inc., whose lead product, Accelerated Reader (AR), is used in more than half the nation's public schools. Renaissance has built such a following behind AR that it regularly holds massive annual conferences that feel like religious revival meetings. Testimonials at these conferences are typically adorned with lengthy, seemingly solid studies proving AR's power. Yet none of these studies have held up to serious scrutiny. "These studies all suffer from serious confounds or design problems that make it impossible to show that AR improves reading," says Tim Shanahan, professor of urban education at the University of Illinois, Chicago, and director of its Center for Literacy. Shanahan also was a member of the National Reading Panel, the group of reading experts chosen by congressional mandate that published an exacting report in 2000 evaluating decades of research on reading instruction.

Other commercial packages, both computerized and traditional, have not fared much better. In the What Works Clearinghouse ratings, not a single product has more than one study fully meeting WWC research standards. This includes two well-respected software packages: I CAN Learn and Cognitive Tutor. It should be noted, however, that good research is not a quick sign of product effectiveness. Fast ForWord, for example, had one study that cleared the WWC's top bar. That study found that while Fast ForWord was effective with language development, it was ineffective with reading achievement.

Although Waterford has yet to be reviewed by the WWC, it has been treated to four evaluations published in peer-reviewed journals. The first was a 2002 study in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, which found Waterford to be helpful in only one of nine areas the researchers tested. The second, in 2003, was a mixed evaluation in *Reading Research Quarterly*, the journal of the International Reading Association. Why the ambivalence? "The more careful the study, the more mixed the results. That's the punch line," explains Tracy Gray, an expert on educational technology with American Institutes for Research.

The next two studies—a 2004 evaluation in the *Journal of Literacy Research* (JLR), the publication of the National Reading Conference, and a 2005 article in *Reading & Writing Quarterly*—were both positive. But it's not clear these were full or fair contests. Neither study says much about what the non-Waterford students did while their peers played with the new computers; the "control group" should get nothing of comparable novelty or potential power. The 2004 study, Lyon says, suffers from "fatal flaws." And the 2005 study used unusually small test pools: 46 students, who were divided into four even smaller sub-groups. Three of these four, including a non-Waterford group, all made gains. So the study's praise for Waterford rests on one small group: 12 low-performing 1st graders who did not use Waterford. "That's promising, but it's not enough evidence to justify spending a lot of money," says Shanahan.

Pinning Down the Truth

These varied interpretations illustrate yet another lesson: Experts don't all agree on what constitutes good research. As an example, Wayne Linek, professor of education at Texas A&M University, in Commerce, Texas, and co-editor of the *JLR*, finds Lyon's view too narrow. True experimental designs that compare treatment groups to untreated "control" groups can turn students into "guinea pigs," which Linek considers unethical. Furthermore, Linek says, these kinds of studies can lean on quantitative measures—frequency of eye movements, for example, or recognition of certain letters—that are suspect and thus "bad predictors."

Linek is partly right to complain about the current obsession with measurable data, which is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the data are critical—they allow other researchers to replicate the original study's findings, or take them further. On the other hand, any study that looks for data in obscure factors like eye movements can be justly criticized for missing the main event, despite the fact that it qualifies for publication in any number of relatively credible journals.

Linek's first point raises an even more important question: What's wrong with turning students into guinea pigs, anyway? Medical researchers do this with people all the time. If mistakes are going to be made, isn't it more humane to make them with a small number of test subjects than with the general population?

While the research community debates such questions, the commercial sector has felt free to devise its own interpretations. Andy Myers, chief operations officer for Pearson Digital Learning, takes a sunny view of Waterford's scientific grounding. "In our experience," he says, "the more in-depth the evaluation process is, the more the Waterford program shines." When asked about the weaknesses that Lyon and others see in the Waterford studies, Myers acknowledged the studies' limitations. Then, echoing Ephraim, L.A.'s chief instruction officer, Myers questioned the relevance of the research itself. "The studies may or may not meet the rigorous standards of the What Works Clearinghouse," he said. "But what's more important to a district is, 'Does it work with our students?' Then they're going to want to expand it." When a prominent company like Pearson dismisses the quantitative research, it exploits the fact that teachers and their administrators don't understand it, and excuses them for disregarding it.

If the education world has been living in a kind of scientific denial, that era may be fast drawing to a close. At this point, the advocates of classic, quantitative science clearly have the ear of the Bush administration. And they are setting today's education standards. With its next round of software research, IES will release individual evaluations. It is also expanding its evaluations to include textbooks. Eventually, a complete list of governmentally approved product ratings will be just a mouse click away. That means that someday, it will be easy for the marketplace—namely, district superintendents and their purchasing agents—to embrace high scientific standards. When that time comes, the spoils won't go to companies that have busied themselves ginning up studies full of tilted numbers. The victors will instead be those who practice true R&D—that is, companies that dare to use these intervening years of confusion to subject their materials to research that is both rigorous and independent.

Todd Oppenheimer is the author of The Flickering Mind: Saving Education from the False Promise of Technology, *which was a finalist for the 2003 book award from Investigative Reporters & Editors. He can be reached at www.flickeringmind.net.*

Air Force One

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Confessions of a “No Child

An interview with Sandy Kress

With the due date for the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) right around the corner, *Education Next* thought it apt to probe the lessons learned in the five years since the act's passage. After all, as the cliché goes, if we don't learn from history we are bound to repeat its mistakes. In that spirit, this past summer we conducted an e-mail interview with Sandy Kress, a lawyer and former school board member who, as a domestic policy advisor in the White House, served as President Bush's chief negotiator during the original NCLB debate. We asked him about the genesis of key aspects of the federal law, whether its crafters foresaw any of its major glitches, and what he thinks of NCLB's prospects going forward.

EdNext: How were the basic contours of the NCLB accountability system arrived at? Did the drafters of the law truly believe that getting 100 percent of students to proficiency by 2014 was realistic?

Sandy Kress: The accountability provisions were built on the foundation of the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act. The goal was to build muscle where there was little or none, drawing on ideas in place in states like Texas. Education Trust was deeply involved, as were key members of Congress from both sides of the aisle. Reformers had come up with choice ideas and notions of flexibility in return for improvements in performance. There was healthy discussion on both sides.

Left Behind" *Supporter*

As to the 2014 goal, the thinking was simple: if qualified teachers are teaching to standards set by the adults in a state, why shouldn't all (cognitively able) students perform accordingly to those standards by 2014? The bar was not set too high. Indeed, some would argue it was set too low or that states have the flexibility to set it too low. Look at current math and reading standards in the states. Is it unreasonable to expect all students starting in kindergarten to get there by graduation? I don't think so. I realize it doesn't happen in enough places. But is that due to the viability of doing it? Or is it due to a lack of will, reasonably sound policy, effective use of resources, or all of these factors?

I do believe that education standards for our youngsters depend heavily on the will of politically active parents. If they have low expectations, there will be low standards, and there's nothing government can or will do to change it.

EdNext: You ask, "Is it unreasonable to expect all students starting in kindergarten to get [to proficiency] by graduation?" But that's not what NCLB requires. By 2014 it requires all students in every grade level to get to proficiency in every year—even 3rd graders who are born into poverty, or high-school students who moved to the United States two years prior. Should our focus be getting all students to proficiency by the time they graduate high school rather than by the end of each grade or by 2014?

SK: I believe strongly that virtually all youngsters ought to be performing at grade level each year. There are a small number of students, such as the severely cognitively disabled, who will not perform at such a level, and the law should recognize these challenges. But for the cognitively able who start school in our country (the vast majority of our students), there is no reason they can't all be at grade level each year. There will be little improvement in getting students to the goal of proficiency by graduation if we don't dramatically improve our ability to bring students to grade-level performance each year.

EdNext: Was there much concern about the law creating a "race to the bottom" among the states, or any steps taken to minimize that risk? Were national standards ever considered?

SK: The federal government wasn't even close to ready (and still isn't) to set standards for the states. So, little could be done to prevent states "racing to the bottom" with their standards, if they chose to do so. We did think about it. Our conclusion was that we needed to maintain expectations for low-income youngsters, with respect to proficiency, that are the same as those for middle- and upper-income youngsters. That was considered the role and mission of the federal government. And we thought that the parents of middle- and upper-income youngsters would take care of their interests politically in the states by insisting on appropriate standards.

Much has been made of states' dumbing down their standards. I don't believe this has actually happened. In some states, there's actually been movement, though slow to be sure, to raise standards. The problem generally has been that the standards were and are still too low. This condition predates accountability and NCLB. Look at state standards in the mid-1980s.

Bottom line: We need to build greater awareness and support for high standards with rigorous accountability for youngsters learning at that level. It's not one or the other. There's no substitute.

EdNext: Would you now concede that "parents of middle- and upper-income youngsters" are not going to "take care of their interests politically in the states by insisting on appropriate standards"? What's Plan B if we want to raise standards? Can the federal government do anything to help?

SK: *I do believe that education standards for our youngsters depend heavily on the will of politically active parents. If they have low expectations, there will be low standards, and there's nothing government can or will do to change it.*

Having said that, I think that the business community and education reformers must do everything they can to educate citizens, opinion shapers, and civic and political leaders about the urgent need to set higher standards. Our young people will have a limited future if we fail at this challenge. Indeed, the very future of our country and our way of life depend upon our success.

EdNext: How did science wind up becoming a "kind-of" content area for NCLB, while history did not? Were there concerns that curricula might be narrowed or other subjects might be squeezed out by the focus on math and reading?

SK: We thought that getting reading and math right was a good first step, so we started with the idea that enhanced accountability ought to be geared to reading and math. There was support in the Congress for going further with respect to science, at least as to the testing. That extension passed in the House and was retained in the bill. There wasn't comparable advocacy for history. Also, conservatives watched any extension with an eagle eye. So NCLB went as far as it could.

Curricula only narrow when poor teachers and/or administrators allow that to happen. It's pathetic. Poor practitioners do this and then blame it on NCLB. Ridiculous. If math and reading are professionally and effectively taught, there's plenty of time for other courses. Indeed, science, history, poetry, and so much other material can be utilized significantly in the effective teaching of reading. And, guess what, a student who can read can study history! A student who is proficient in math can better study science. I'm still looking for the student who can't read but who is great in history or poetry or biology.

That some engage in goofy practice should never be the basis for policy. The goofy practice should simply be avoided.

Sandy Kress (at left) with Camille Kress and Senator Ted Kennedy

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

EdNext: How was it decided to have public choice precede supplemental services—and are you surprised by current interest in reversing that order?

SK: Public-school choice comes before supplemental services in NCLB for a very interesting reason. Conservatives pointed to a legal requirement in an earlier appropriations law that created public-school choice after schools failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years. While conservatives liked supplemental services, they weren't going to "lose a year" in getting to public-school choice in NCLB.

I'm not surprised that many want to get to supplemental services first. It seems a more natural next step. The key point for me, however, is that these parental choices need to be given life! They need to be enforced.

EdNext: How do you respond to the criticism that states were given too much leeway to do things as they wish? That the law didn't create serious sanctions for states that misbehave?

SK: I think NCLB was as muscular as it could be politically and still pass. The feds are a "7 percent investor" after all, and the states and districts are at 93 percent. Many states vigorously resisted what was done, and I believe they would have stopped any bill that was more aggressive.

The feds are a "7 percent investor" after all, and the states and districts are at 93 percent. Many states vigorously resisted what was done, and I believe they would have stopped any bill that was more aggressive.

EdNext: Observers have noted that many states appear to be complying with NCLB's highly qualified teacher (HQT) provision mostly through creative bookkeeping, and are doing no more than they must when it comes to public-school choice or supplemental services. What can be done about states that may be abiding by the letter but not the spirit of the law on important provisions?

SK: I believe the Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II) should be made more results oriented. States and districts currently get $3 billion to improve teacher quality. There's no measure anywhere of the value of that investment. The states should begin to measure teacher effectiveness and implement consequences to improve teacher effectiveness. This approach would go way beyond the highly qualified teacher provision.

As to the failure to implement choice and supplemental services, I believe there must be better enforcement. My own favorite idea is, "either give Mom and Dad the choices in the law or, as a last resort, assign their per capita amount to the school of their choice!"

EdNext: What would you do differently next time? What policies might be achievable in 2009, say, that weren't in 2001?

SK: We built a formidable coalition that we'd be very fortunate to replicate in the upcoming reauthorization.

States and districts are currently given billions of dollars each year in Title II funding to improve teacher and principal quality without any accountability at all. Changing this should be a major feature of reauthorization.

The next effort will have its own challenges and opportunities. While some on the left will resist further reform, protecting certain special interests, and some on the right will resist "federal involvement," we now feel the pressure of global competition in ways that were only hinted at in 2001. The Chinese and the Indians would get a big boost just as they're muscling up their K–12 and higher education systems if the U.S. lightens up on standards and accountability.

A few major areas I hope will receive attention during reauthorization are college/workplace readiness, including the promotion of more rigorous standards; greater accountability at the secondary level; more sophisticated policy and greater accountability for improving teacher effectiveness, particularly at the late elementary and secondary levels; a broadening of attention to math and science as well as to history; and refinements in AYP to focus greater attention and improvement on the persistently failing schools by offering real choices to parents of students stuck in such schools.

High-school reform should include setting higher standards that lead students to graduate ready for college and good jobs. That was the idea behind the newly created Academic Competitiveness Grants, which provide larger Pell grants for eligible college students who have completed a rigorous program in high school. There should be at least one assessment near graduation that measures readiness for college and the workplace. Appropriate consequences should be established.

Particular attention must be paid to dramatically improving education in the late elementary and middle grades. Math and science education in those grades is thoroughly inadequate. Youngsters are showing up in huge numbers at high school, totally unprepared for the rigor of the current curriculum, not to mention the even more rigorous curriculum that must be put in place to meet our graduates' needs.

We must go much further in improving teacher quality. The highly qualified teacher provisions have been helpful but are primitive. The next round must get to measuring teacher effectiveness based on student achievement, promoting professional development that is based on research and effective practice and improves performance, providing incentives for teachers who are effective, and requiring removal of teachers who, even with solid professional development, can't or don't improve. States must do something about the pathetic state of affairs in too many colleges of education, and proven alternative sources of teachers must be encouraged.

States and districts are currently given billions of dollars each year in Title II funding to improve teacher and principal quality without any accountability at all. Changing this should be a major feature of reauthorization. The dropout problem (fraudulent reporting) must be exposed. Serious accountability for not keeping youngsters at grade level each year must be implemented.

This brings me to AYP. My own thought is that a compromise is in order. States ought to be able to use a growth model so long as the growth expectation year by year gets youngsters to college/workplace readiness at the end.

Further, I'd be willing to reserve the tougher consequences (choice and supplemental services) for the worst 15 percent or so of schools in the state. The states could define which schools these are as long as improving performance of low-income youngsters is central to the criteria. Other schools not making AYP would face other consequences. But, in return for this flexibility, states and districts would be required to give all parents of students in the 15 percent schools the choices we intended, including private school options as a last resort. Failure to provide these choices to youngsters in pervasively failing schools should be subject to severe sanction.

EdNext: So you propose limiting the "tougher consequences" to the bottom 15 percent of schools. Was there any consideration of such a triage approach in 2001?

SK: Yes. Sandy Feldman [then president of the American Federation of Teachers] stepped forward with the notion of designating a bottom tier of schools, schools that were generally poor-performing. We tried the idea out on some of the players. Many states were comfortable with this general idea, though, of course, none had gone as far with the sort of consequences we were discussing. It also fit the notion in business of "a bottom X percent."

We discussed several such alternatives, including the idea of using AYP as the bill laid it out but letting states have a role in subdividing the list, so that a bottom group would be subject to the most serious consequences.

We spent a considerable amount of time examining such alternatives. We couldn't get a consensus largely because of widespread fear that taking such a course would weaken the initiative, create gaming opportunities, and nullify the promise of "No Child Left Behind."

> **The parents of disabled students will watch such deliberations (on AYP) with an eagle eye. They believe correctly that NCLB has been a huge advance in increasing accountability and improving education for disabled children.**

EdNext: Meanwhile, many schools that are not making adequate yearly progress have failed to do so because their special-education or English Language Learner subgroups are not making the grade (see Figure 1). The decision to include these groups has been criticized by many. How was that decision made? Were problems foreseen during the 2001 negotiations?

SK: We, the administration and congressional staff, spent a lot of time considering the ramifications of adding these subgroups. It was clear that this would significantly increase the number of schools identified as needing improvement. There was general concern about that, and some wanted to limit the subgroups. Yet it was very hard to say that these students deserved less protection than others.

There was talk of permitting an index system as part of the AYP language to deal with the effects of the larger number of subgroups. Try after try, the group failed to draft a system that would ensure that districts and schools wouldn't return to judging schools principally or totally on the basis of aggregated results.

An improved system could be devised during reauthorization. But I assure you that the parents of disabled students, for example, will watch such deliberations with an eagle eye. They believe correctly that

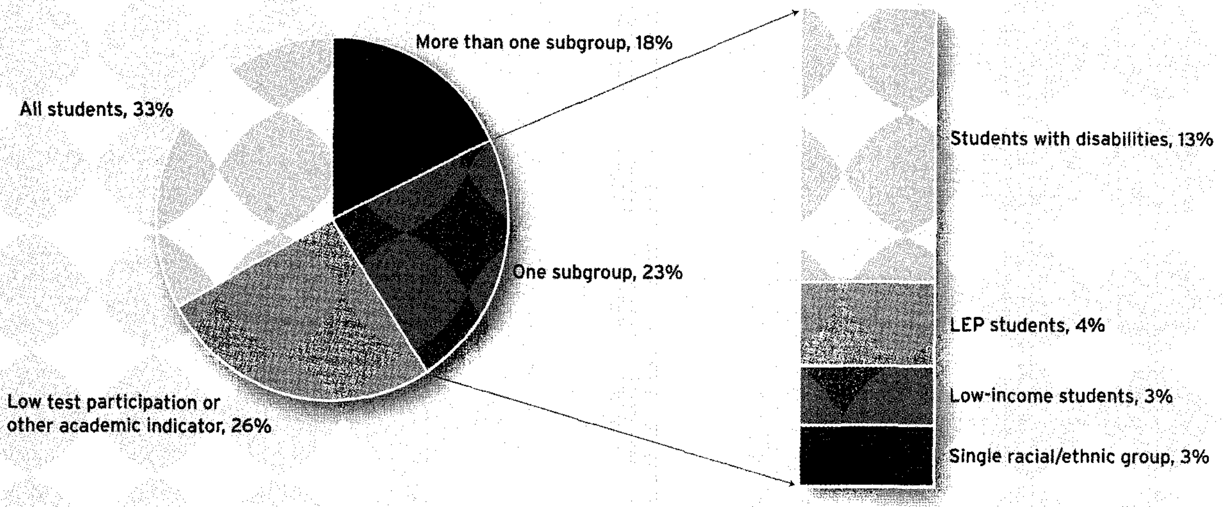
Food for thought
THE COMMON REVIEW
THE BERLIN GAMES IN MYTH AND MEMORY
I Got Yelled at by Susan Sontag
High-decibel Debate and the Dumbing of America
Humor on the Orwellian Express
Tolerance and Neglect in the New Europe
E-Books for E-Schnooks

Since 2001 ***The Common Review*** has published essays and reviews for readers interested in the books and ideas that appeal to our best intellectual and ethical values. Visit us at **thecommonreview.org** today to view selected content or to begin your annual subscription for only $17.95 US / $24.95 International. *Bon appétit!*

Stumbling Blocks (Figure 1)

Of the schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2003–04, only one-third failed because of the test score performance of all students. A higher proportion of the schools did not make AYP because of the performance of one or more subgroups.

Reasons Schools Failed to Make Adequate Yearly Progress in 2003-04



Note: Figure is based on data from 33 states

SOURCE: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, "National Assessment of Title I: Interim Report"

NCLB has been a huge advance in increasing accountability and improving education for disabled children.

EdNext: What one compromise would you most like to have back? Were you all aware at the time that the absence of vouchers might weaken support for the law among conservatives?

SK: Yes, we knew quite well the importance of choice to conservatives. Our choice provisions were very important to us. Your question assumes we compromised on vouchers. This is not true. We fought for our proposal and found insufficient support for it or anything like it to pass. There were far more than a majority firmly against us in each and every congressional forum than there were for us and the undecided combined. That lack of basic support made it impossible to pass all we proposed. We never compromised on choice. There were votes on a variety of choice proposals. Other than public-school choice and supplemental services, they all went down by significant margins. The lesson here is simple: we advocates of choice need to build far greater political support.

> **We never compromised on choice. There were votes on a variety of choice proposals. Other than public-school choice and supplemental services, they all went down by significant margins. The lesson here is simple: we advocates of choice need to build far greater political support.**

The compromise I'd like to take back was the final arrangement on AYP. We thought at the time that there should have been greater differentiation among schools that did not make AYP—that is, schools that failed pervasively ought to be treated differently than schools that missed by a little. We worked hard with Congress to do this right, but in the end the deal did not really succeed. This is another area that can be improved in reauthorization—perhaps greater differentiation in return for real choice and consequences for pervasively failing schools.

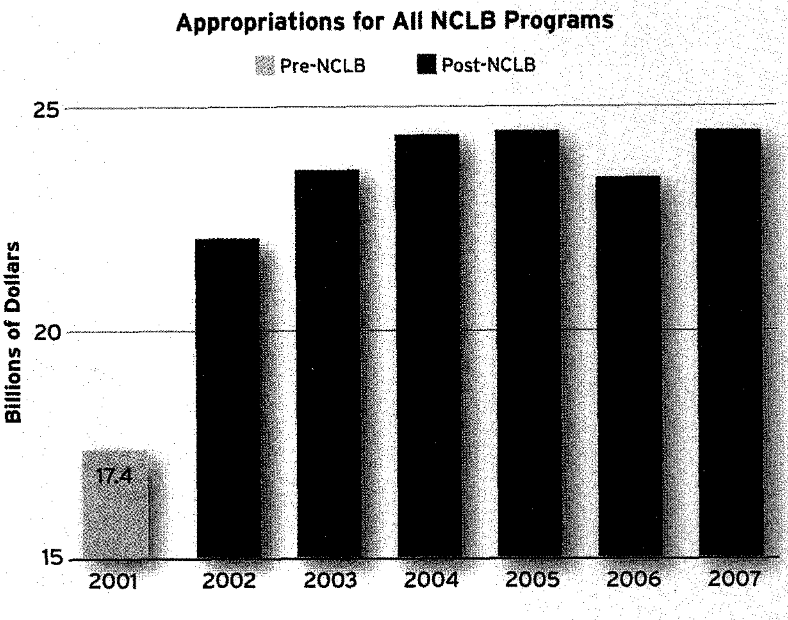
EdNext: On highly qualified teachers, what problems did you anticipate? Was the White House more concerned that the law might stifle nontraditional teacher recruitment and licensure or that the arrangements gave states too much room to game the provisions for veteran teachers?

SK: We initially wanted to work on teacher quality from a somewhat different angle. We were more interested in whether teachers were effective in improving student performance than in whether teachers had certain credentials. Yet we agreed with the promoters of HQT that its overall provisions were a step in the right direction, so we gave them general support. We had some concerns including the two to which you allude, but we thought HQT was a good start.

A lot of work has been done since 2000 in the policy area of measuring teacher effectiveness. Models are developing in Denver, Minnesota, Texas, and among the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) schools, for example. Reauthorization will be a good time to bring some of those lessons to bear.

The Budget Deal (Figure 2)

In 2002, the first year under NCLB, Congress increased funding by $4.5 billion. Annual appropriations since have been about $6 billion above the 2001 funding level.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education

EdNext: What was your understanding of the deal on funding? Democrats claim that the president promised them full funding of NCLB. True?

SK: I was right in the middle of the "deal" on funding. Margaret Spellings and I worked on it daily. The president was thoroughly involved, as were the secretary, [budget director] Mitch Daniels, and other key officials in the White House.

The negotiation was rather simple. The Democrats wanted a significant increase in actual spending on ESEA, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, along with reform. We had a lengthy back-and-forth on appropriations. We got to $4 billion. The administration stuck by the deal and negotiated hard with its allies on the appropriations committees, and this very large initial increase was agreed to. We all had expectations for the future. There is no doubt that Democrats wanted more each year. I wanted the beneficiaries of the increased spending to embrace the reforms, or support even greater reforms. But the actual "deal" was for the additional $4 billion (see Figure 2).

EdNext: So there was no deal on out-year spending? Even in the president's FY 2003 budget proposal, which was released less than a month after he signed NCLB (and which flatlined funding for the law)?

SK: The deal was for the one-year increase during FY 2002. You'll recall that beginning with FY 2003 there were terrible fiscal pressures due in part to the economic downturn and to the cost of the war on terror. Notwithstanding that change in circumstances, the Congress did proceed with a further increase in spending for education in that subsequent fiscal year.

EdNext: Some critics have suggested that the administration's embrace of allies like the Education Trust has allowed liberal advocates to define the aims and shape the future of the NCLB reform agenda. What's your take on such concerns?

SK: Education Trust and the civil rights groups have been great allies. They have been tough and true and courageous. Their support has helped sustain NCLB through attacks by defenders of the status quo. And their support is critical to extending and strengthening the act in reauthorization. There are differences, to be sure, between these groups and conservatives on many issues. But, given the power of the status quo, education reformers across the political spectrum must join forces where they can for there to be any chance of success. ■

feature

From Aristotle to Angelou

Best practices in character education

The modern character education movement emerged in the 1980s as a consequence of growing parental and public concern for moral drift, or what sociologist James Davison Hunter referred to as "the death of character." This public anomie was captured in these words from Sanford McDonnell, chairman emeritus of McDonnell Douglas and chair of the Character Education Partnership (CEP), a national umbrella group that provides coordination, encouragement, and support to schools:

> *We have a crisis of character all across America.... the good news is that we know what to do about it: get back to the core values of our American heritage in our homes, our schools, our businesses, our government, and indeed in each of our daily lives.*

Two decades later, it is time to ask, What are the successes of the character education movement? What do best practices look like? This essay explores these questions through the study of character education in six schools. Over the course of two months, I visited each of the selected schools to learn about the program in place—why it was initiated and by whom; what roles faculty, staff,

BY PAUL J. DOVRE

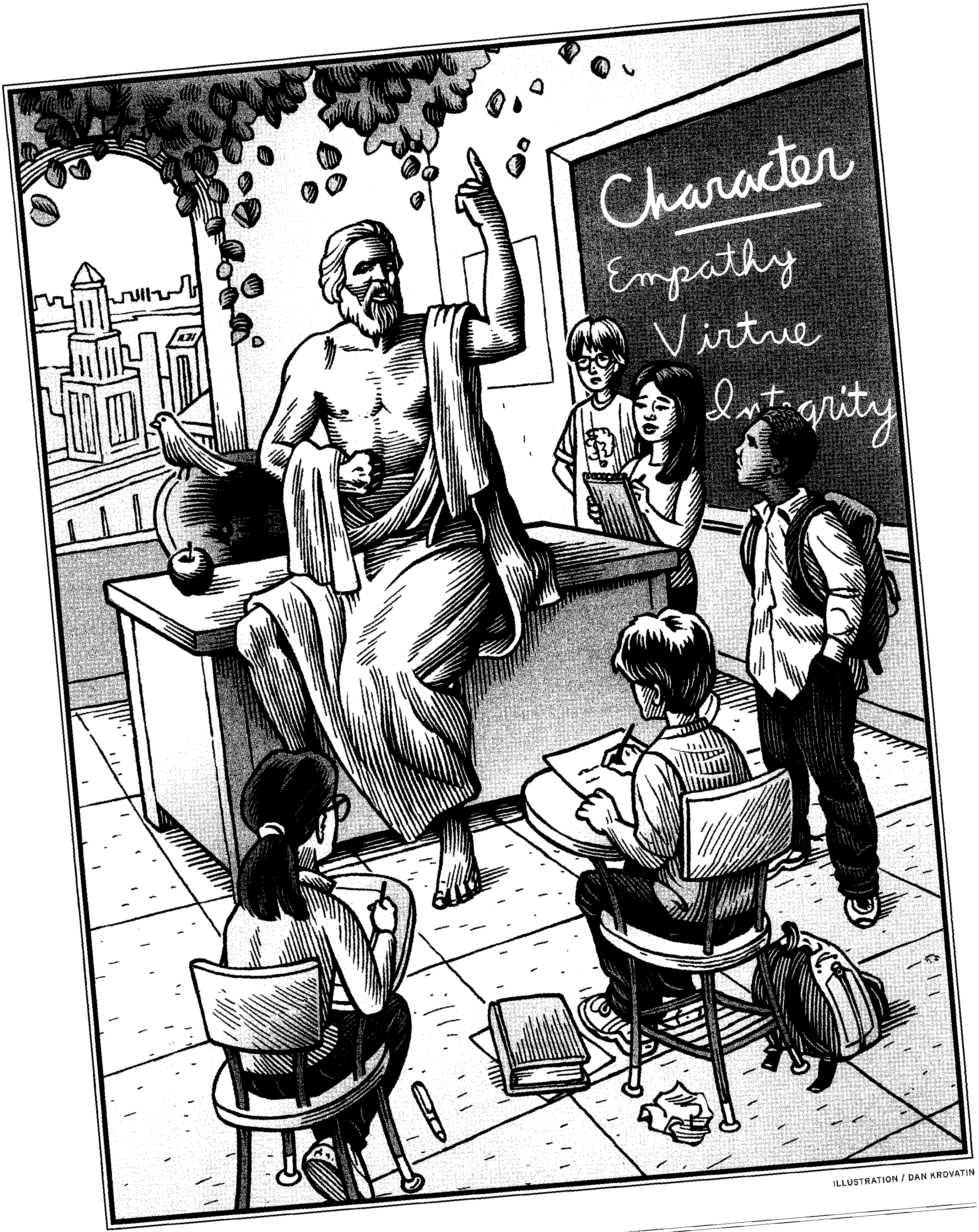

Character
Empathy
Virtue
Integrity

ILLUSTRATION / DAN KROVATIN

THOUGH THEY DIFFER IN MANY WAYS, THE SIX SCHOOLS SHARE THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM IN CHARACTER EDUCATION. PEDAGOGY IS GUIDED BY A SET OF CORE VALUES OR VIRTUES.

and parents play; what the key program elements are; what the results are and how they are measured; and what obstacles the program faces. I selected programs in schools of various sizes, types, grade levels, and locations. The six sites include a suburban public school district and a small-town elementary school, a private religious school and a private secular school, an alternative public high school and a charter school. Each had been designated a National School of Character by the Character Education Partnership (CEP).

Each year since 1998, the CEP has identified several National Schools of Character through a juried process. The award recognizes schools and school districts that have improved the "behavior and learning of their students through character education." CEP has also developed quality standards to aid schools in evaluating character education programs and curricula. National Schools of Character exemplify CEP's Eleven Principles, among them defining "'character' comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior"; implementing "a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed"; providing "students with opportunities for moral action"; and using "a comprehensive, intentional, proactive, and effective approach to character development." CEP describes character education not as an "add-on" to the curriculum, but as "a different way of teaching; it is a comprehensive approach that promotes core values in all phases of school life and permeates the entire school culture."

Though they differ in many ways, the six schools share the critical elements of a comprehensive program in character education. Pedagogy is guided by a set of *core values* or *virtues.* The schools provide abundant opportunities for *moral discourse* about complex, contested matters and *moral action* through both organized community service and in-school conduct. Later, I will draw some conclusions, but first let's hear their stories.

Educating Citizens
Hudson Public Schools
Hudson, Massachusetts

"Education is about helping young people feel they can make a difference in the world. The purpose of public education is to create a public in which a democracy can thrive. Character education is a key vehicle to both goals." The citizenship program in the Hudson schools reflects this vision of Superintendent Sheldon H. Berman, former head of Educators for Social Responsibility. Located in a suburb of Worcester, Massachusetts, the Hudson district educates 2,750 students in four elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. The district serves an increasingly diverse population, 30 percent of whom are immigrants from Brazil and the Azores.

Dr. Berman and the faculty worked together to develop a character education program in part to prevent disciplinary problems. A citizen group conducted a comprehensive community survey to discern what residents expected of their school. Discussion in the community and in the school led to consensus around three core goals: empathy, ethics, and service. The character education program was built slowly, with broad input, and with attention to faculty development and participation.

The Hudson effort implements age-appropriate strategies at every class level. In pre-K–5 classes, faculty use a program from Educators for Social Responsibility called Adventures in Peacemaking, among others. Second Step is a violence prevention program for grades pre-K to 9 developed by the Committee for Children. Thirty lessons at each elementary grade level help students develop empathy and learn anger management and conflict resolution skills. Ninth-grade history and English classes feature ethics-based civics instruction with a focus on the Holocaust. More than 85 percent of students are involved in service learning: kindergartners connect with a local food pantry, 1st graders interact with local senior citizens, and high-school students work on environmental issues.

In Brian Daniels's senior ethics course, students cover the waterfront of current issues including affirmative action, assisted suicide, abortion, homosexuality, and a range of political topics. Daniels uses a Socratic process in addressing each topic, and students are forced to deal with their own and their generation's inclinations toward relativism and individualism. Students learn to confront difference, take and defend positions, and practice civility.

Character education is embedded in the district's stated goals and criteria for hiring new faculty. Teachers are highly invested through a continuing series of faculty initiatives. Superintendent Berman teaches courses for the faculty covering central pedagogical elements of the program and Mary H. McCarthy provides overall coordination. Parents are involved in the Family Character Education Council.

Building Social Skills

The Somers Elementary School

Somers, Connecticut

The 21 members of Rebecca Leiphart's 4th-grade class gather for their morning meeting. In the first round of conversation, students exchange compliments for constructive social conduct such as reaching out to another student or always saying hello. The conversation shifts to expressions of regret by individual students: the failure to return something borrowed, not standing up for a classmate. The third part of the meeting is devoted to problem solving. A boy complains that other students are pushing him out of his seat on the bus. Class members offer advice. Each student addresses others by name, takes a turn speaking, is attentive to each speaker, and expresses thanks for the compliment or counsel. Ms. Leiphart notes that the class will return to this discussion at its next meeting to see whether or not progress has been made.

Located in northern Connecticut, the Somers Elementary School serves 750 students in kindergarten through 5th grade in a community that is increasing in economic, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Ms. Leiphart's morning meeting is part of the school's character education program, initiated in 1995 and motivated by the merger of three schools into one, out of concern for the social skills of the students and in response to the post-Columbine awareness that schools should give greater consideration to students' social needs.

Principal Debra Adamczyk helped establish the character education program. Maureen Winseck, school psychologist, and Pat Clark, media specialist, provided leadership in implementation. The school identified five character goals on which to concentrate: cooperation, assert oneself positively, take responsibility, empathize, and show self-respect (CARES). The Social Skills Committee, a broadly representative group formed to give direction to the program, developed an activities guide that includes both homegrown and external vendor materials and implementation strategies to assist in developing social skills, promoting positive interaction, and integrating social skills into academic studies. Content elements include readings about Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, and others, and the book *Voices of Hope*, about everyday heroes. Class exercises focus on particular virtues and social skills. Peer activities are a prominent program component. Upperclass students are trained in a pedagogy called Friendship Groups.

A parents' newsletter and web site, workshops for parents on social skills strategies, and parent volunteer and mentoring activities create significant buy-in for the program. Parents receive regular reports on attendance, academic achievement, and discipline, which are discussed at regularly scheduled family conferences that include students in the 4th and 5th grades.

Grounded in the Classics

The Montrose School

Natick, Massachusetts

Soon after the school day begins at the Montrose School, students gather for an enrichment period. They may attend morning Mass or assemble in a quiet room for reading and reflection.

Students commute from 35 area towns to this college-preparatory day school, established in 1979 by parents who were unhappy with the direction of both the Boston-area public and Catholic diocesan schools. They wanted a school that centered on the Catholic faith and the liberal arts, as expressed in the school's mission statement, "a Montrose education challenges each student to cultivate intellect and character, leadership and service, faith and reason." The school enrolls 135 girls in grades 6–12; 75 percent are Catholic. The school director, Karen Bohlin, is a leading teacher-scholar in the character education movement and was previously the director of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University.

In addition to core studies in English, math, science, history, languages, and the fine arts, students take a required sequence in religion and philosophy: 6th-grade students study the Apostles' Creed and the saints; in the 7th grade, they focus on the Church and the Ten Commandments; 8th graders conduct an overview of the Bible and the Sacraments; 9th-grade students study the Old Testament, the Apologetics, and C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*; the 10th-grade focus is the New Testament and Church history; 11th grade introduces metaphysics and ethics; and the 12th-grade course features the philosophy and social teachings of the Catholic Church. Juniors and seniors spend time on texts by Aristotle, Plato, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others.

The study of character is embedded in the broader curriculum. Courses in literature feature classic works, and history classes pick up on such challenging topics as the Holocaust and civil rights. Each week, homeroom teachers lead a discussion of character issues including friendship, conflict resolution, and being in control of one's emotions. A student club focuses on service learning opportunities, and many classes include service dimensions.

School assemblies feature outside speakers on socially significant issues. On the Monday of my visit, a physician from Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and the Harvard Medical School spoke about end-of-life issues. After the assembly, students gathered in homerooms for faculty-led discussions on the speaker's presentation. Montrose students are successful participants in a local Martin Luther King Jr. essay contest as well as an annual national conference on ethics and culture at the University of Notre Dame. For six consecutive years, Montrose students have been the only high school presenters at the

Notre Dame conference, with the most recent papers discussing how the arts may reduce the allure of television and the influence of music on teen culture.

Student advisement is a key function of each faculty member. As one student explained, "It's my advisor who challenges me to put virtue into practice. She's the person I can talk to and get advice from; she knows when I am just being too proud; she helps me to know myself better."

Comprehensiveness
Montclair Kimberley Academy
Montclair, New Jersey

In Ralph Pacifico's kindergarten physical-education class at Montclair, students form a circle around a multicolored parachute. Each panel of the parachute represents a character expectation. The students recite each goal and then explain, in their own words, what the goal means to them. Then, in an exercise in teamwork, they move the huge parachute around the room.

The school's motto, *Knowledge, Vision, Integrity*, has shaped the academic and character goals of Montclair Kimberley throughout its history. As students move into the upper grades, their ownership of the character goals is demonstrated in student government, community service, the honor system, and athletics.

Montclair Kimberley Academy dates to 1878. Current enrollment in the pre-kindergarten through 12th grades exceeds 1,000 students from 80 communities across northern New Jersey. Former headmaster Peter Greer arrived in 1992 and soon after convened a group of teachers, staff, parents, and alumni to write a guiding statement for the school's character education program. "Our Common Purpose" articulates the school's aspirations. Greek philosophy shaped the framework, and the seven virtues set forth in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—respect, friendship, responsibility, confidence, temperance, fairness, and being informed—became the character expectations for the academy. The school added an eighth expectation, honesty, in 2004 in connection with the reformulation of the academy's honor code. The story of Gyges's ring from Plato's *Republic* provides the touchstone for the curriculum.

The Core Works Program, developed by the faculty, includes 60 readings representing the greatest works in Western and non-Western literature plus masterpieces in the arts. Curricula tie the material to the character goals and are tailored to each class level. *Charlotte's Web* is the first core work for 1st graders, 7th graders study *The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories*, while upperclass students delve into such masters as Dante, Confucius, and Plato.

Responsive Classroom guides the character education program in the pre-K though elementary grades. The goal is to identify and cultivate character goals in all aspects of the students' experience both inside and outside of the classroom. During morning meeting, students identify, study, and practice the virtues and engage in community building.

The key, says new headmaster Thomas Nammack, is that "the school is working on character education in many ways, on many levels, all at the same time." Moreover, he adds, "we strive to give our students a sense of what is possible in the task of mastering their own fates, and we seek to equip them to become independent practitioners of humane behavior."

Freedom and Accountability
Malcolm Shabazz City High School
Madison, Wisconsin

For most Shabazz students, the traditional high school was an uncomfortable straitjacket; 92 percent say they were "bored" in their previous high school. Shabazz is one of the oldest alternative schools in the nation, established in 1971 to educate Madison students whose circumstances, attitudes, and conduct are often not conducive to successful academic work in a traditional school setting. The school serves a diverse student population of 140 in grades 9–12. Its mission is to create a learning environment free of discrimination and harassment and to strengthen the connection between the students and their community.

Shabazz students must commit to the academic expectations of the school and give assurance, in writing, that they will observe nonharassment, alcohol and other drug, and attendance policies. These expectations are upfront, concrete, and strictly enforced. At the same time, the school does not have a dress code, has few standard academic requirements, and provides many nontraditional learning opportunities. At the end of each course, students reflect on 10 or 12 key questions. Faculty members, in turn, develop their own essays to evaluate each student. If the student meets all of the required course goals and 70 to 80 percent of the optional goals, he or she passes the course.

Four pillars shape character education at the Malcolm Shabazz High School. First, there are the explicit expectations. Second, all entering students take "The Shabazz Experience" in which they explore the school's mission and the life of Malcolm Shabazz, better know as Malcolm X. A third pillar is Mirrors of Discrimination. One premise of this class is that America is not a "melting pot" but a "salad bowl," where "the races and cultures of our society remain distinct and unique even though we all live together in the same big 'bowl.'" Readings include an essay about World War II German patriot Martin Niemoeler, Howard Zinn's *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, and Beverly Tatum's *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The fourth

THESE SIX CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS SHARE KEY FEATURES, MANY OF WHICH ARE EXPLICIT IN THE CEP CRITERIA. THE PROGRAMS ARE COMPREHENSIVE, ENCOMPASSING ALL SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, ENGAGING ALL MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF, AND INCLUDING ALL GRADE LEVELS.

pillar is service learning. Retired social worker Jane Kavaloski was a key architect of the Shabazz program, and research she initiated established a positive connection between service learning and both student motivation and learning. Projects include volunteer work in the American South, Latin America, poverty zones of American cities, neighborhood schools, and environmentally vulnerable areas. Project Green Team is a coordinated set of courses in which students earn physical education and science credits for their work on stream ecology and fly-fishing. In Equity in Computer Access, instructor Tina Murray works with her students to recycle discarded computers for use by students, families, or institutions that cannot afford to purchase one.

Intentional Design

Community of Peace Academy

St. Paul, Minnesota

Sarah Zosel's 10th graders are studying world religions. In class, short video clips feature spokespersons for the Buddhist and Native American religions. Zosel asks students to identify the points of emphasis in each religion. An Asian student mentions the Buddhist emphasis on tolerance and peace, adding, "There is so much more to life than sex, television, clothes, and money and all that stuff." Zosel reiterates the key questions that religions try to answer: How should we live? Why do people suffer? What happens when I die? Once a week the class has a class meeting or, as they call it, a "circle talk" in which students raise issues they face at school or in their personal lives or discuss current events.

Community of Peace Academy (CPA) was established as a charter school and is sponsored by the St. Paul Public School District. Seventy percent of the 550 students in grades K through 12 are Hmong and 20 percent are African American; 70 percent come from homes in which English is the second language; most are poor. On rare occasions, weekend neighborhood gang activities reverberate in school hallways on Monday morning (as they did on the day of my visit).

Community Peace Academy was designed around three components: caring relationships (community), a strong ethical focus (peace), and seriousness about academic achievement (academy). The founder and head of CPA is Dr. Karen J. Rusthoven, who got her start as an educator in the 1960s. Inspired by the idealism of that decade, she believes education is the key to resolving economic and social disparities. Her vision for CPA: "At Community of Peace Academy, our desired outcome is to educate the whole person—mind, body and will—for peace, justice, freedom, compassion, wholeness and fullness of life for all."

Faculty serve as exemplars and motivators, attending to student needs, while respectful of the moral and intellectual freedom of each student. Relatively small classes—16 in grades K and 1, and 24 in other grades—permit faculty to give close attention to each student's progress. Rusthoven and the CPA faculty adopted many established best practices, including a peacemaking curriculum for the primary grades developed by Growing Communities for Peace; PeaceBuilders, a conflict prevention program; the Heartwood series of readings in ethics for grades K–6, which features seven ethical principles; and the Responsive Classroom, which encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and moral conduct. Ninth graders take an ethics class focusing on care for self, others, and learning. Tenth graders study world religions, and juniors enroll in a PeaceBuilders course, which includes a vision quest retreat and a personal service project. CPA is developing a course for seniors that will involve significant engagement in a community project.

Measuring Success

These six character education programs share key features, many of which are explicit in the CEP criteria. The programs are comprehensive, encompassing all school activities, engaging all members of the faculty and staff, and including all grade levels. At each site, there is clarity and transparency about goals and values. Character education was initially the vision of a school principal or superintendent. Program fit in hiring and subsequent evaluation of faculty is a priority. Adequate and appropriately led and supported opportunities for faculty and curriculum development are critical components. Parent support and engagement is another common thread.

> STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN PROGRAMS AIMED AT IMPROVING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS "HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER ATTENDANCE RECORDS; THEIR CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR IS MORE CONSTRUCTIVE AND LESS OFTEN DISRUPTIVE; THEY LIKE SCHOOL MORE; AND THEY HAVE BETTER GRADE POINT AVERAGES."

Variation across the sites is evident in stated program objectives, curricular content, and pedagogy as well as in the school culture, the student population, and the community. Program goals range from the citizenship objectives of the Hudson schools to the social action agenda of Shabazz to the moral and intellectual reflection of Montrose. The schools draw content from sources as disparate as religious works, literary classics, contemporary novels, and social commentary. As a Catholic school, Montrose can tie character education directly to a religious tradition. While this facilitates the program, results in the other schools demonstrate that religious affiliation is not a prerequisite for success. Two of the six sites—Somers Elementary and the Hudson district—are public schools to which students are assigned, while the other four are schools of choice. I observed no obvious effects of this difference on program outcomes.

Program assessment, a work in progress in most of the schools, reflects similar variety. Much of the research cited by the schools focuses on such objectives as improved discipline, campus climate, social attitudes, and community engagement. Some evaluations limit measures to those that are relatively easy to track, such as improved attendance or reduced incidents of violence and cheating. Others seek to tie character education to broader outcomes, including improved academic achievement:

- In Hudson, enthusiasm from the community for the character education program and other district initiatives is one measure of success; others are SAT scores that exceed national and state averages and the percentage of graduates (79 percent) who pursue postsecondary education.
- Somers Elementary School faculty report less classroom bullying than before the program was initiated, more time in class for academic work, and strong family support.
- Veteran teachers at Montclair Kimberley Academy speak of the positive difference the program has made in campus climate and student conduct, including a decline in the incidence of student cheating.
- All Montrose graduates matriculate to four-year colleges, many of which are among the best in the nation. While exit interviews with each graduate provide Montrose School director Dr. Karen Bohlin with feedback on all aspects of the student experience, she identified the need for a more comprehensive assessment program.
- Ninety-three percent of Shabazz students graduate from high school, and 74 percent pursue postsecondary education. Incoming students had a 40 percent truancy rate at their former schools, while at Shabazz the truancy rate is 16 percent. Both students and parents give Shabazz approval ratings that are much higher than those other district schools receive.
- Of the six, Community Peace Academy devotes the most energy and resources to program assessment. Qualitative and quantitative exercises measure everything from academic performance to campus climate. Teachers, parents, students, and graduates are part of the assessment process, which includes character education goals. The data are positive with respect to those goals. Eighty-two percent of sophomores met or exceeded the state standard on the 2003 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment in math, and 84 percent met or exceeded similar standards in reading. No other public or charter high school in the state with similar percentages of low-income and ESL students even approached these rates. The assessment data provide the basis for an annual review of the school's programs which, in turn, leads to an improvement plan for the following year.

While both advocates and critics call for more comprehensive research on the effects of character education strategies, a growing body of research data appears to support the experiences of the schools studied. The *Journal of Moral Education* has been around for a while, and an increasing number of its articles address the effectiveness of character education strategies with quantitative methodologies. The first issues of the *Journal of Character Education* have made their appearance with similar content. The publications of CIRCLE, The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, and CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, are also contributing to the inquiry.

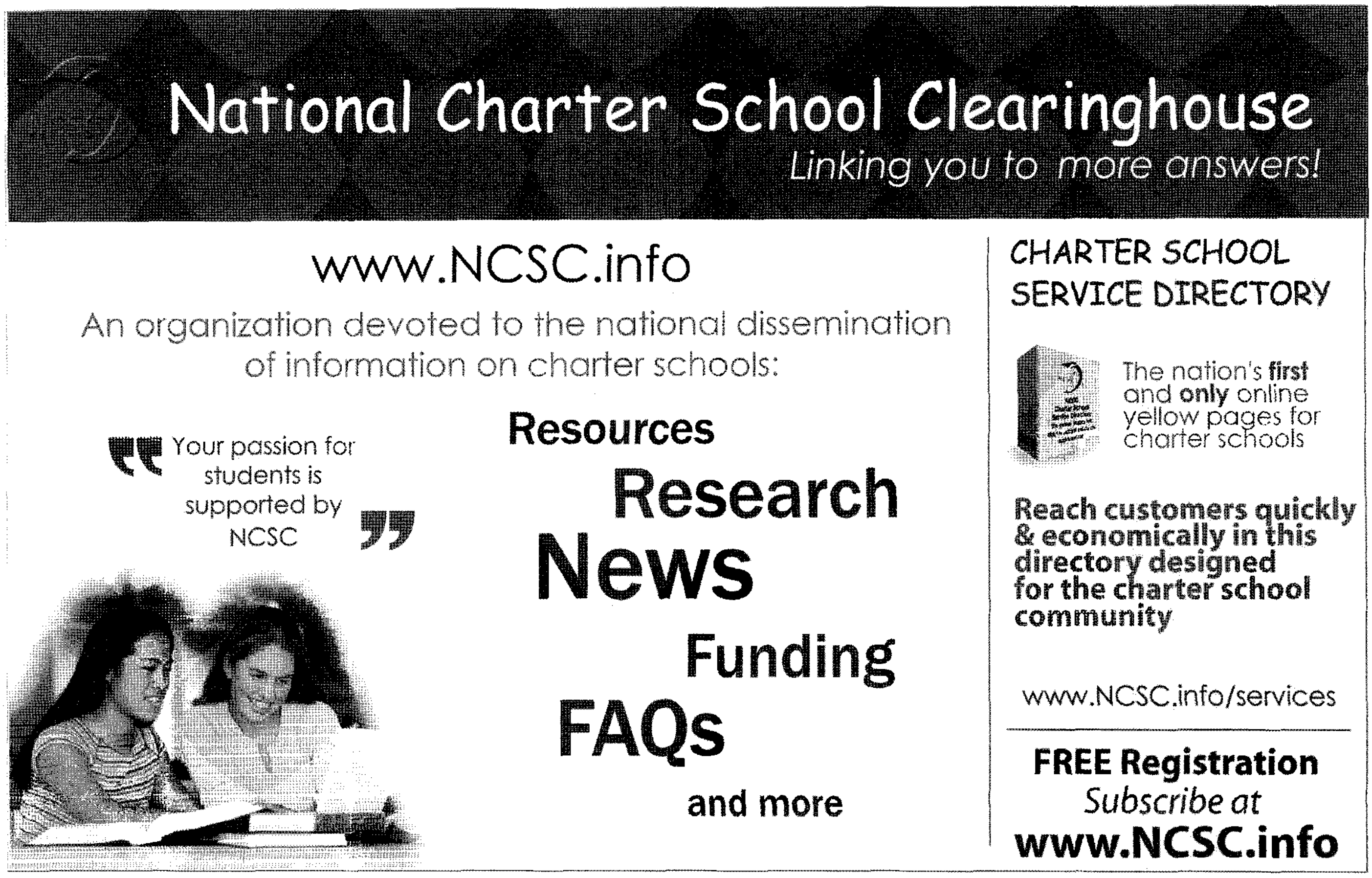
Public and political emphasis on academic achievement and accountability has led both program leaders and education researchers to explore the relationship between the affective goals of character education and academic achievement. The What Works Clearinghouse, part of the federal government's Institute of Education Sciences, released in September 2006 its review of 55 studies of character education programs, which looked at "student outcomes related to positive character development, prosocial behavior, and academic performance."

Marvin W. Berkowitz and Melinda C. Bier, both of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, reviewed 78 studies and identified 33 programs that researchers deemed effective with respect to both affective and academic goals. Peacebuilders and Second Step were among the programs they studied. They conclude that "effective character education supports and enhances the academic goals of schools: good character promotes learning."

CASEL president Roger P. Weissberg and Joseph Durlak, a Loyola University psychologist, reviewed 300 studies and found that, compared with nonparticipants, students participating in programs aimed at improving the social and emotional learning environment in schools "have significantly better attendance records; their classroom behavior is more constructive and less often disruptive; they like school more; and they have better grade point averages. They are also less likely to be suspended or otherwise disciplined." Participants scored at least 10 points higher in achievement tests than students who did not participate.

So far, character education programs that are carefully designed and implemented appear to be succeeding. Undeterred by philosophical disputes on the one hand and the preoccupation with academic achievement on the other, character education finds its strength at the grass roots, in those individual schools and communities where teachers, administrators, and citizens initiate programs designed to improve civility and citizenship—legitimate goals in their own right. If research continues to show that comprehensive character education has positive effects on student achievement as well, then the movement may in time gain more robust political and financial support from education policymakers.

Paul J. Dovre is president emeritus of Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, and was a visiting scholar with the Program on Education Policy and Governance at the Kennedy School of Government in 2005–06.



National Charter School Clearinghouse
Linking you to more answers!

www.NCSC.info
An organization devoted to the national dissemination of information on charter schools:

"Your passion for students is supported by NCSC"

Resources
Research
News
Funding
FAQs
and more

CHARTER SCHOOL SERVICE DIRECTORY

The nation's **first** and **only** online yellow pages for charter schools

Reach customers quickly & economically in this directory designed for the charter school community

www.NCSC.info/services

FREE Registration
Subscribe at
www.NCSC.info

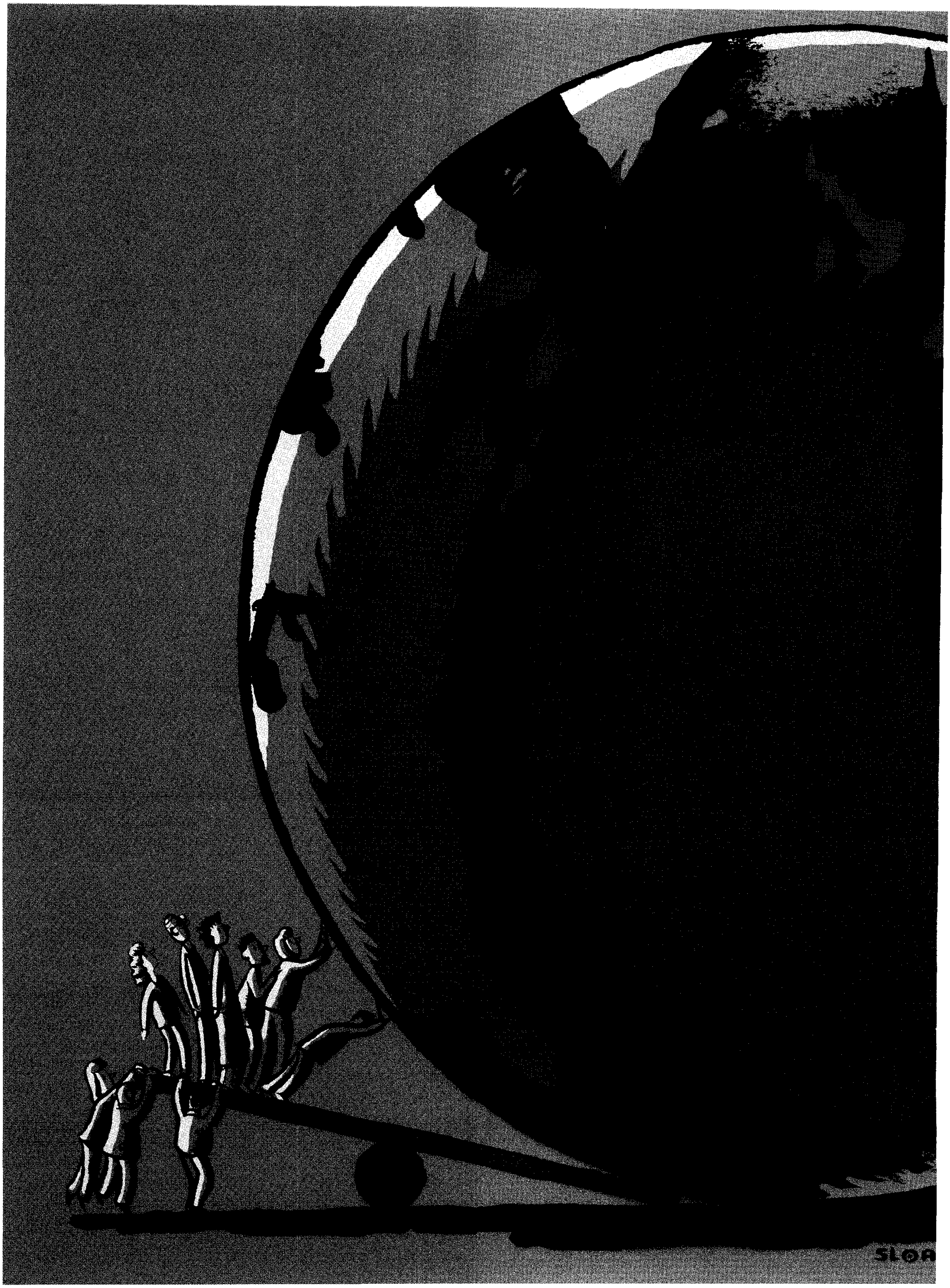


ILLUSTRATION / MICHAEL SLOAN

Why Big Impact Entrepreneurs Are Rare

The dangers of challenging power

High-profile entrepreneurs like those behind KIPP and Teach For America are determined to transform K–12 education. But will their accomplishments ever amount to wholesale reform? Or will they end up crushed or absorbed by the bureaucratic behemoth of public education? Frederick Hess and Chester Finn charge that those entrepreneurs who succeed in the hostile environment of public education do so by compromising and accommodating in order to win friends and allies in the locales that comprise their markets.

But several entrepreneurs beg to differ. Michelle Rhee and David Keeling explain how skillful entrepreneurs can change school systems from the inside out. Steven Wilson argues that the most successful entrepreneurs are those who stand their ground when research and experience are on their side. Kim Smith shows how entrepreneurs can leverage their outsider status to set change in motion. Only Joan Snowden insists that entrepreneurs can never provide the big fixes education needs because their efforts are not scalable. ☞

What Innovators Can, and Cannot, Do

Squeezing into local markets and cutting deals

K-12 education should abound with opportunities for entrepreneurial activity. Here we have a vast yet loosely coupled industry that serves 50 million students, encompasses more than 95,000 schools in 15,000 districts, employs more than 6 million people, and expends upward of a half trillion dollars annually. Given widespread concern about current performance, it would seem fertile ground for innovation and enterprise. Yet public schooling in the United States remains at its core a rule-bound, government-centric quasi-monopoly largely consumed by the politics of apportioning resources among longtime stakeholders. This closed ecosystem alienates creative problem solvers while erecting bureaucratic barriers against those who would devise new solutions. The result is a sector where successful entrepreneurs have historically been the rarest of beasts.

BY FREDERICK M. HESS AND CHESTER E. FINN JR.

Entrepreneurs Can Innovate and Advocate

by Michelle Rhee and David Keeling

At The New Teacher Project (TNTP), we believe it is possible for organizations to implement ground-level reforms on a meaningful scale even while advocating for more fundamental policy changes. In New York, TNTP gathered data on the school staffing rules of the city teachers union contract. The city's new contract effectively put an end to the forcing of unwanted teachers on schools. In California, TNTP worked with state senator Jack Scott and local advocacy groups to pass a bill for the reform of teacher transfer policies, changing the dynamics of teacher hiring for some 3,000 low-performing schools statewide.

The New Teacher Project has no greater financial resources, political savvy, experience, or dedication than our peer organizations. What, then, accounts for our success to date?

First, TNTP strives to effect change from the inside out. School systems and the bureaucracies that run them are a fact of life. We believe that organizations that learn to be effective within the system can do more good on a shorter timeline. Most of our staff works from within school district offices and hand in hand with district personnel. This positioning affords us unique advantages: we can earn the confidence of district staff, identify and understand the policy obstacles we encounter, and gather hard data to support our arguments for change. At the same time, we are able to establish our own subculture and maintain a high degree of autonomy.

Second, TNTP does not view policy reform efforts as separate from the daily work of recruiting, training, and hiring high-quality teachers, but rather as an integral part of it. Our recruitment programs' frustration with the slow pace of hiring in urban districts prompted our first study of teacher hiring policies, published as *Missed Opportunities*. Since then, we have faced other policy challenges. To improve the performance of our programs and advance our mission, we must actively engage in these problems; the cost of inaction is much higher than the cost of speaking out.

Third, the reforms we seek share two characteristics: they are driven by objective, nonpartisan research, and they are based on commonsense arguments that address the concerns of a nonspecialist audience. Our diverse base of support shields us from some of the blowback that comes with challenging the status quo. Furthermore, we are careful to present balanced arguments and avoid targeting a particular group or constituency. We recognize that, more often than not, education challenges are created by the interaction of multiple systems and groups.

TNTP believes that marrying policy and implementation is the most effective way to tackle major problems in education. We are committed to innovation through practical, reality-based reforms. Rather than pursue either "advocacy" or "demonstration," TNTP is blazing both paths at the same time.

Marrying policy and implementation is the most effective way to tackle major problems in education.

***Michelle Rhee** is chief executive officer and president of The New Teacher Project. **David Keeling** serves as the organization's communications strategist.*

Over the past two decades, many efforts to infuse K–12 education with innovation and enterprise have flamed out or settled into cozy symbiosis with the status quo. Today, an unprecedented (if still small) number of entrepreneurial efforts are taking root in the rocky soil of elementary and secondary education. Those who crack the constraints of our hidebound system—well-known names like KIPP and Teach For America and a handful of others—have become educational celebrities. And rightfully so. Their handiwork may be our best chance to provide U.S. children with a world-class education in the 21st century. They are deserving of both admiration and thanks.

However, as with so much of celebrity culture, there are traps for the unwary. Here, after making clear why successful education entrepreneurship is so hard, we explain why those who clear the many hurdles are not likely—and ought not be expected—to crusade as well for sweeping policy reforms.

Obviously, many entrepreneurs have no desire to produce systemic change—charter operators who wish only to operate a few good schools, virtual-school companies pursuing simply a reasonable profit, or alternative hiring ventures that seek only to bring more talent into the nation's classrooms. It is the few "change agent" entrepreneurs who are seeking to recast schooling. These leaders are often featured—in conferences, TV shows, and magazines—as the voices of reinvention.

Our focus is on just this subset of entrepreneurs who seek to transform core features of K–12 education, such as who teaches, how schools are designed, and who operates them. To date, their numbers are small and their scale modest, but the best known among them are prominent indeed, including Teach For America (TFA), the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), High Tech High, National Heritage Academies (NHA), the New Teacher Project (TNTP), New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), K12, and Edison Schools. Some are avowedly nonprofit while others strive to make money for their owners. All are mission-driven; they seek to boost the quality, productivity, and diversity of American elementary and secondary schooling via entrepreneurial innovation and efficiency.

Our focus is on just this subset of entrepreneurs who seek to transform core features of K-12 education, such as who teaches, how schools are designed, and who operates them. To date, their numbers are small and their scale modest.

The New Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs of many sorts are striving to find new and better ways of delivering K–12 education and to put themselves and their organizations on the map. Profit-seeking education management organizations (EMOs), like Edison and National Heritage Academies, look to create new schools and operate them as charters or under contract with school systems. Their nonprofit cousins (known as charter management organizations or CMOs), such as KIPP, High Tech High, Green Dot, and Aspire, typically underwritten by philanthropists, seek via invention and replication to create better school options for needy kids. Technology outfits, such as APEX, K12, and the Sylvan spinoff called Connections Academy, feature distance learning and virtual schools. "Human capital" innovators include Teach For America, New Leaders for New Schools, and the New Teacher Project.

The enterprises named above, plus dozens (but not hundreds) more, have established beachheads of innovation in particular locales. Some have built strong reputations for quality (e.g., KIPP) and for attracting new people into education who produce spillover benefits (e.g., the remarkable record of TFA alums). Sometimes they've had state or federal policy help, through permissive state laws (e.g., charter laws, alternative certification laws), discretionary grants, or earmarked funds (e.g., KIPP gets money from Congress; TFA recruits benefit from AmeriCorps). Many have obtained local assistance from a friendly (or desperate) superintendent willing to provide funding, space, and a hand through the bureaucratic jungle. At bottom, however, what they've done is squeeze into local markets and then cut deals that enable them to operate in those venues.

To understand the behavior of these entrepreneurs, one must appreciate the precariousness of their situations and how thoroughly these individuals have relied

Challenge the Status Quo

Going along to get along: whether the goal is social change or entrepreneurial success, it's a most unlikely formula. Can education entrepreneurs, who aim for both, at once accommodate the establishment and challenge it to change?

School districts, which until the advent of charter schools enjoyed an exclusive franchise, pose a unique challenge to private sector innovators: the change-averse district is both client and competitor. In the few markets where education entrepreneurs gain a toehold, the price of doing business is often accommodation, compromise, and even disingenuousness.

How effective has this approach been? Ten years and a billion dollars of private investment later, for-profit and nonprofit organizations have fallen far short of transforming K-12 education.

The greatest successes—financial and academic—have come when education entrepreneurs have held firm. Consider the school management business. National Heritage Academies is the only education on "inside" negotiations and sympathetic officials. KIPP's founders were so frustrated by the Houston school district that Mike Feinberg famously sat for hours on the hood of Superintendent Rod Paige's car, waiting for him to leave the office for the day so that he could plead for a place to open the first KIPP Academy. The creators of the Washington, D.C., SEED school, a winner of the Kennedy School's 2005 Innovations in Government award, had to lobby the requisite language through Congress, then win city council backing for the necessary provisions, before wedging their new boarding school into the upper floors of a museum. In 1995, with TFA on the ropes from financial instability and a scathing

[redacted] *by Steven F. Wilson*

management organization to have made money for a number of years. Founder J. C. Huizenga has refused to play along with the fatuous expectation that each school must be "customized" to the local community—for the industry's very premise is that a well-designed school model will work equally well in Anacostia or Albany. Huizenga cops to the critics' charge of operating "cookie-cutter" schools. "If you're going to do something, it has to be replicable," he says. Ralph Bistany of SABIS doesn't kowtow to the myth of small classes (now enshrined in some state statutes), even when it means losing a lucrative contract. And he rightly challenges the illusive but near universal expectation that a teacher, through the magic of "differentiated" or "individualized" instruction, can effectively teach a class—of whatever size—where students arrive with many and unknown gaps in precursor skills: "That is not teaching. That is a study hall." When all the students have progressed through SABIS's explicit, cumulative curriculum, it doesn't matter whether the class has 10 students or 50. "In fact, 50 is better," he adds pugnaciously. "We have worked with classes of 70 in countries where it is allowed, and it has worked like a charm." SABIS demonstrates the strength of its model as its middle- and high-school students surge ahead while their peers in urban district schools fall increasingly behind.

By contrast, Chancellor Academies promised parents smaller classes than district competitors in Florida, where schools were crowded and underfunded, could offer. As a business model, it was a curious bet. Chancellor's backers, some of the smartest money on Wall Street, must have known when they invested that research found no support for the union's persistent call to reduce class sizes, and

that cutting staffing costs was essential to turning a profit. Some years later, they sold their stake in the company for a punishing loss.

It is not only the regulatory environment that founders must directly challenge, but the entire sweep of policies, practices, and pedagogies, from federal law to local union contracts, from teacher preparation programs to the design of mainstream textbooks, that together define how most public schools today function. Consider one such nearly universal rule: the highest wages must go to teachers with advanced education degrees and seniority. Never mind that research shows neither correlates with teacher effectiveness. Whether through calculation, timidity, or a failure of imagination, education entrepreneurs have generally failed to challenge such dictates. (They could, for instance, attract with higher pay teachers with strong subject-matter command and verbal skills, attributes known to actually matter.) Going along to get along locked them into enormously costly and ineffective practices little different from their district competitors.

It is not only the regulatory environment that founders must directly challenge, but the entire sweep of policies, practices, and pedagogies that together define how most public schools today function.

As in any industry, education entrepreneurs must radically depart from establishment ways if they are going to make good on their claim to produce superior results. Bold thinking and public candor will, in time, be richly rewarded.

Steven F. Wilson *is executive vice president for product development at Edison Schools, senior fellow at Education Sector, and author of* Learning on the Job: When Business Takes On Public Schools *(Harvard University Press, 2006).*

Piecemeal Entrepreneurship Is Not the Answer

by Joan Snowden

It is true that the public education enterprise is risk-averse and resistant to change. But the fact that the system is slow to change is both good and bad. The current system has not been responsive enough to efforts to transform it, but it has no mechanism or capacity to separate the wheat from the chaff, no means for determining what is a good idea and what is some individual's pet hobbyhorse. Not every new idea is a good idea. Good intentions, energy, and strong conviction—the qualities most lauded in education entrepreneurs—can also lead into quagmires. The challenge is how to identify promising, scalable models of improvement and link them to a systemic model of school change.

Most entrepreneurial efforts address a small piece of the larger picture: a pay change, a recruitment strategy, a charter school, a virtual school. These are not efforts to change the entire system, so it is no wonder entrepreneurs learn how to succeed within the system. While Frederick Hess and Chester Finn call this settling "into a cozy symbiosis with the status quo," I prefer to see it as success in implementation. It is easy for policy wonks to complain that the entrepreneurs don't tear down the system or publicly criticize it. While this may be true, the wonks don't have to build anything, or make anything work. As my grandmother used to say: "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Teach For America (TFA) is a case in point. What started as a naive teacher-recruitment program designed to harness the energy and idealism of well-educated youth has become a sophisticated alternative pathway into the classroom. In addition to a summer "pre-service teaching experience," TFA recruits have access to an excellent curriculum that deals with classroom management, parent-teacher relationships, teaching reading, and other critical elements of effective instruction. These first-rate materials contain information that all beginning teachers should have access to but which, according to a recent review of teacher education offerings, is not consistently available to aspiring teachers in many of our teacher-training institutions. TFA also has developed a new teacher-support system, which helps with the myriad challenges that any new teacher is likely to encounter, particularly when placed in a high-need setting. This expansion of the TFA program is hardly the product of accommodation; rather it is the result of learning from experience what it takes to succeed as a teacher.

The current system has no mechanism or capacity to separate the wheat from the chaff, no means for determining what is a good idea and what is some individual's pet hobbyhorse.

Yet TFA, despite its success, can never be the answer to staffing the nation's schools. It is by definition a niche player, offering a piecemeal solution that does not address the need for more fundamental changes in the ways districts manage and deploy their education human resources or sustain and develop teacher talent and expertise over time. It does not address the changes we need to see in teacher compensation, the organization of the school day, the role of instructional leadership, and a range of other key factors crucial to getting the teacher-quality equation right in a workforce of 3,000,000 facing 200,000 teacher hires a year, due to high rates of turnover and mounting retirements.

The entrepreneurial enterprises that Hess and Finn identify cannot transform the system, and not primarily for the reasons they identify—district inertia, union vitriol—but for more substantial reasons: they are not scalable, they address a small piece of the system, and they are not systemic. While a business model can be helpful, entrepreneurship per se is not the answer.

As many business executives have come to realize, schools are not businesses. The schooling enterprise is more complex and must respond to more than simple "market forces." In addition, there is little capacity to create the structures and develop the human resources to make systemic change successful. Therein lies our dilemma, and the reason that piecemeal enterprise won't take us where we need to go.

***Joan Snowden** is president of the Education Study Center and former director of the Educational Issues department of the American Federation of Teachers.*

attack by influential professor Linda Darling-Hammond, who argued that TFA teachers were ill-prepared for the challenges of today's classrooms, founder Wendy Kopp needed the Carnegie Corporation and other influentials to convince TFA's backers not to turn off the funding spigot.

Keep in mind, too, how small, even marginal, these entrepreneurial ventures are alongside the behemoth of American K–12 education. TFA deploys 4,400 new teachers at a time in 22 regions, within a public-school workforce of 3 million teachers. NLNS produces about 150 new principals a year and operates in just six districts. Fourteen years after its founding, Edison is running 157 of some 95,000 U.S. public schools, NHA enrolls 30,000 students in 51 charter schools, and KIPP, despite its extraordinary fame and widespread demand, has so far bestowed its esteemed brand on just 53 schools. Aspire Public Schools still encompasses just 16 schools, while Steve Barr's much-heralded Green Dot teaches 3,000 students in 10 schools.

Micromarket Management

These operations tend to cluster in a few communities. There are only five cities—Washington, Baltimore, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco-Oakland—in which TFA, New Leaders, KIPP, and Edison all operate. A few other cities, like Philadelphia, Memphis, Indianapolis, and New Orleans, are relatively welcoming, but the list of truly receptive districts does not require more than ten fingers to tally. Meanwhile, even in friendly markets, entrepreneurs generally account for only a smattering of schools, students, teachers, or principals.

Reliance on a few "micromarkets" gives enormous influence to those who make the rules in those locales. Entrepreneurs must ensure that their offerings are palatable in the few places where they're welcome. This means that Edison, for instance, will twist itself into knots—altering its school design and personnel practices—to land 20 schools in Philadelphia, even though, in theory, there are tens of thousands of schools that it could be pursuing, hundreds of which are judged by No Child Left Behind to require "restructuring."

Even in receptive locales, only narrow slices of the schools and services are truly open to entrepreneurs. When it outsourced management of some schools to private firms, for example, Philadelphia limited contracting to the district's persistently low-performing schools. New York's schools chancellor Joel Klein aims for 50 charters in a district with more than 1,000 schools. Chicago's "Renaissance 2010" project involves just a fraction of the Windy City's public schools. What looks from a distance like a wealth of opportunities soon reduces to a handful of "entrepreneurial" states, a few ardently pursued districts, and a short list of real openings.

Some enterprises have been able to enter slightly broader markets. Aspire Public Schools and High Tech High have won welcomes in multiple California communities. But even such ventures, while successfully expanding within a familiar state, find their reach limited. High Tech High found its ability to grow beyond California so constrained that it stopped trying. Aspire has no intention of attempting to venture beyond state borders.

Opposition from political constituencies within and around public education, including teacher unions, school administrators, and school boards, has thwarted the spread of K–12 entrepreneurial activity. Because successful growth frequently requires statutory amendments or regulatory exemptions (e.g., raising the cap on charter schools, getting a waiver from traditional licensure, working a special wrinkle into the teachers' contract), entrepreneurs must navigate multiple shoals where foes can wreck even highly seaworthy enterprises.

Reliance on a few "micromarkets" gives enormous influence to those who make the rules in those locales. Entrepreneurs must ensure that their offerings are palatable in the few places where they're welcome.

The obstacles are legion. New Leaders for New Schools has had difficulty convincing districts to place its talented nontraditional principals, and even more frustration working with education schools and state licensing agencies to credential them. KIPP, despite a stellar track record educating disadvantaged youth, has found its expansion efforts slowed by local opponents who claim that charter schools are at war with public education. In communities like Dallas and San Francisco, Edison Schools has been the victim of political campaigns orchestrated in large part by the teacher unions, and the firm's moves to manage district schools have been hobbled by stifling provisions in collective bargaining agreements. The New Teacher Project finds its efforts to help districts recruit sorely needed instructors undercut by local personnel officials who routinely object to these outsiders or understate the cost of district recruiting (creating inaccurate comparisons for TNTP's pricing).

Entrepreneurial ventures face internal constraints, too. KIPP's biggest limitation has been identifying enough capable school leaders. Though TFA currently receives nearly ten applications for every slot, its commitment to admitting only the best candidates impedes its growth, as do limits on funding. CMOs are challenged with respect both to philanthropic seed capital (even the giant Gates and Walton foundations have their limits!) and staff capacity. Precisely because the field of education has not nurtured a large cadre of entrepreneurial individuals, growing ventures often run up against stark personnel shortages. This is especially true for those in unsexy middle-America locales, less so in the coastal cities that beckon cadres of new college graduates.

Success via Accommodation

The bottom line is that those education entrepreneurs who succeed in this generally hostile environment do so by compromising and accommodating in order to win friends, make allies, and evade enemies in the locales that comprise their micromarkets. They've acclimated to a stark reality: the change-averse public-school establishment is itself their principal client, customer and sometime regulator. Innovation normally occurs only when that establishment allows it—and only up to the limits that it allows.

While many status-quo education leaders are well versed in explaining what can't be done, the new entrepreneurs are the MacGyvers of the sector. Like the hero of the 1980s TV show, they display a remarkable capacity for getting things done—even if the tools at hand are only duct tape, bubble gum, and an oilcan. What sets entrepreneurs apart is that they are creative, passionate, and inexhaustible. Those who launched KIPP, TFA, NewSchools, Edison, and TNTP routinely worked more than 100 hours a week while scrambling about the country with no surety of success or even job security. To keep themselves and their teams inspired, they need to believe that their ingenuity and sweat will ultimately yield success. Those engaged in such exertions have little time or use for policy debates; they pour their energy into working with, around, and through whatever barriers exist.

In truth, entrepreneurs have scant incentive to "crusade" for changes in the ground rules. Such behavior will only rankle establishment figures and stir new resistance. Instead, each entrepreneur focuses on the sensible, plodding, arduous work of growing within the existing rules—and winning exemptions from those rules while ruffling as few feathers as possible.

Few entrepreneurs lobby for large-scale reforms, testify, write sharp-edged articles, give speeches damning anachronistic policies, or otherwise actively engage in efforts to influence public policy or shape opinion. They are visible, often wildly so, but seldom critical. One notable exception is The New Teacher Project's biting exposés of dysfunctional district hiring practices and teacher contracts. For playing this invaluable

Leverage from the Outside

by Kim Sm

Today, public education is undergoing a massive shift from a focus on inputs, process, and compliance toward a culture driven by performance and outcomes. Entrepreneurs are particularly important at this juncture for their vision and ability to doggedly pursue results that stretch far beyond the norms we accept today.

Yet entrepreneurs' value lies not only in creating proof points of successful alternative approaches, but also in their very position—outside of the existing system. This status gives them leverage to influence the status quo through "co-opetition," setting change in motion by using either competitive pressure or a collaborative approach, or both. When education entrepreneurs negotiate with a district or state leader, and have the option of pursuing their goals outside of the system, they represent real potential for change.

One example of co-opetition can be found in contracts that New Leaders for New Schools has signed to bring its principals to high-need urban areas that include autonomy agreements for all high-performing principals in that city's public schools. The districts competing to bring New Leaders to town felt a

The new entrepreneurs are the MacGyvers of the sector. Like the hero of the 1980s TV show, they display a remarkable capacity for getting things done—even if the tools at hand are only duct tape, bubble gum, and an oilcan.

severe need for such talent, and New Leaders could credibly say they would take their services elsewhere if the terms they deemed necessary for principals' success were not met.

Many district leaders see charter schools as competitors because they attract students away from district schools. But these leaders could also embrace charter schools as partners in overcrowded areas or as help for turning around chronically failing schools. Since charter schools and charter networks are able to grow without district partnerships, they have some leverage in negotiating terms for collaborative work. Unfortunately, the lack of facilities for charter schools often undermines operators' potential for leverage because they must make compromises they might not otherwise choose in order to secure buildings for their schools. Were policy advocates to solve the facilities financing problem, then charter school systems would have greater negotiating power with districts.

By redefining what is possible, effective education entrepreneurs can change the conversation among policymakers.

By redefining what is possible, effective education entrepreneurs can change the conversation among policymakers. Those who create the "rules" under which public education operates can and should translate into action the lessons that entrepreneurs teach. By using coopetition to both push and help public school systems operate in different and better ways—and by sharing their lessons with policy advocates—education entrepreneurs can be a powerful force for catalyzing broader change in public education.

***Kim Smith** is co-founder and former CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, a venture philanthropy firm based in San Francisco, California.*

public role, TNTP has been rewarded with political headaches and union vitriol. TNTP was forced to fund the work out of operating monies because no donors thought it a worthwhile investment. Far more common are efforts to soft-pedal differences with the status quo. Entrepreneurs we spoke with for this piece told us frankly—"know that I'm not going to give you anything critical" and "of course we have to make nice with the district in public." (These same individuals are vastly more outspoken, and often bracingly critical, in private.)

In public, there are any number of ways to pull punches and smooth edges. Consider, for example, the results of a 2005 TFA survey of its participants showing that 91 percent of them thought schools should expect inner-city students to achieve academically at the same level as students from wealthier backgrounds—a powerful boost to reformers' insistence that all children can in fact learn far more than many are expected to today. Those results drew much attention, and TFA promoted them with gusto. Yet program leaders took pains not to indict traditional colleges of education or district officials for failing to prepare or recruit more such teachers. The multipage press releases announcing the survey results included not a single sentence even glancingly critical of anyone with a role in the status quo.

The same prudential behavior was on display in Edison Schools founder Chris Whittle's noted 2005 book, *Crash Course*, a volume promoted as a "revolutionary" treatise on school reform. Business pundit James Glassman wryly noted that Whittle took care to assure teacher unions and educators that "they have nothing to fear from him." A scarred veteran of the entrepreneurial trenches with many vivid stories to recount in private, Whittle has learned to eschew confrontation and employ feel-good rhetoric, even writing in an open letter to union leaders, "Though teachers are your primary constituency, I know that your organizations care deeply about children, too." He promised that, under his proposed reforms, "union 'profit margins' would actually improve." Avoiding divisive policy proposals, his major recommendations are for Washington to spend more on education research and to launch new programs to train teachers and principals—though even there Whittle is careful to explain that he doesn't mean to criticize existing programs. While "there are those who believe that America's teachers colleges are part of the problem," he "leave[s] that to others to debate."

The Price of Reticence

Entrepreneurial reticence is understandable, even justifiable, but it also carries risks. Because entrepreneurs have reason to avoid speaking blunt truths to power, the prominence and achievements of some have been used to excuse existing arrangements.

There are two paths to policy change. One is advocacy and agitation; the other is demonstration, the production of "proof points" that new models can work better than the status quo. Both are needed.

This is particularly true in districts where outstanding schools run by entrepreneurial personalities are invoked as evidence that the rules are not so onerous after all. Some districts embrace entrepreneurs as a way to present a "reformist" face while declining to adopt their innovations as general practice. A single KIPP school, a virtual school option, an "alternative" high school operating under unique funding arrangements, a handful of TFA teachers, or a summer school program operated by Edison serves this function in many districts.

The small scale of today's entrepreneurial ventures in K–12 education creates a further problem. Because entrepreneurs have generally migrated to well-defined and reasonably hospitable markets where they can forge alliances and cut deals, the existing "micromarkets" can feed the impression that entrepreneurship in education is inherently a limited, marginal, even ad hoc, activity, a sideshow that offers no systemic solutions. We have all endured a million speeches along the lines of "charter schools [or vouchers] are well and good for the kids who attend them but they're no solution to the problems of public school systems that will forever be attended by the overwhelming majority of kids."

The very newness of education entrepreneurship further limits its role in policy change. If we were more accustomed to this form of innovation, individual entrepreneurs would have greater leeway to speak out on large issues—as well as more cause to compete with one another. One hopes that today's activity will gradually yield such a world.

Different Paths to the Same Goal

In the meantime, clear voices need to be heard on behalf of wholesale reform strategies. But they're different voices. It's wrong to expect successful entrepreneurs to lead the advocacy charge. Reformers and entrepreneurs operate in different spheres. Advocates work in the world of ideas, talk, access, and influence—where visibility and controversy are useful tools. They raise money and enjoy influence to the extent that they appear to affect policy deliberations. They are able to focus on abstract goals—like test scores, teacher quality, or school choice—in debates divorced from the challenges of making reforms actually work in situ. Entrepreneurs face a different calculus, especially for-profit entrepreneurs seeking to maximize return on investment. They gain little from visibility, nothing from notoriety, and have no incentive to argue theoretical aims. Sticking to their knitting means finding ways to make their enterprises work today in specific places, not agitating for massive changes in the ground rules.

Serving as field marshals for large-scale policy change is the proper role of advocates, whose interests do not always coincide with those of entrepreneurs. Indeed, advocacy groups are typically tone-deaf to some challenges facing entrepreneurs—such as the need for human capital, better R & D, increased access to venture capital, back-office services, and incubation—and are thus unhelpful at cultivating the full set of reforms that might help entrepreneurial ventures to prosper. If advocacy organizations wish to pave the way for more entrepreneurial activity, they need to attend to such issues. A classic example is charter advocates settling for state laws that underfund charter schools, even embracing the argument that "charter schools can do it for less" in order to get the law passed, though experience shows that this accommodation can cripple actual entrepreneurs in practice.

If entrepreneurs can be "too nice" in a public forum, self-styled reformers can be too vague—choosing to bang familiar drums like "teacher unions," "school choice," "accountability," or "incentives" rather than talking clearly and concretely about the mechanics of reinventing K–12 education. The challenge is first to recognize that reformers and entrepreneurs pursue different (if ultimately complementary) goals, and second to maximize the extent to which each is mindful of the other's requirements for success.

There are two paths to policy change. One is advocacy and agitation; the other is demonstration, the production of "proof points" that new models can work better than the status quo. Both are needed. But it's a common and unfortunate mistake to imagine that they'll both come from the same places, or to proceed as if that were so. If today's entrepreneurs do a really good job, as many do, without saying a word, they will gradually make the education world more receptive to this mode of activity—and to the policy changes that would facilitate it.

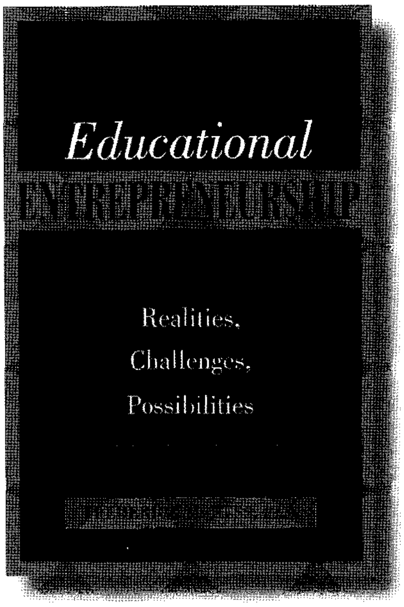
Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and executive editor of Education Next. *His most recent book is* Educational Entrepreneurship: Realities, Challenges, Possibilities *(Harvard Education Press, 2006). Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, and senior editor of* Education Next.

NEW from **Harvard Education Press**

EDUCATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

REALITIES, CHALLENGES, POSSIBILITIES

EDITED BY FREDERICK M. HESS

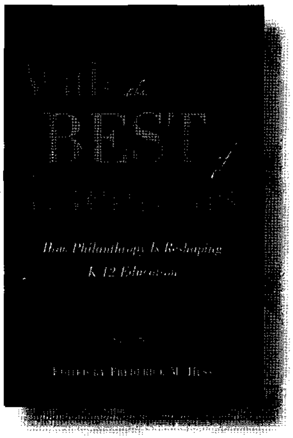

Educational
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Realities,
Challenges,
Possibilities

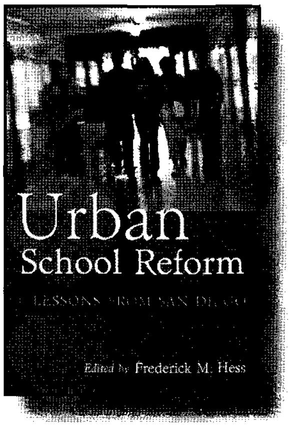
"Educational entrepreneurs are proving that the calcified delivery system of public schooling can be shaken up and retooled for the twenty-first century. Hess and his colleagues look at the phenomenon from every angle in this rich assortment of essays. This is a book that provides plenty of fuel for discussions about where school reform is headed."

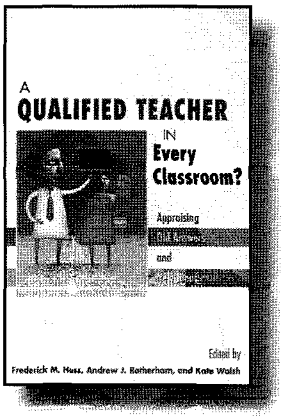
—NELSON SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

2006, 312 pages
Paperback $29.95 / ISBN 1-891792-25-3
Library $59.95 / ISBN 1-891792-26-1

ALSO FROM FREDERICK M. HESS


With the BEST of Intentions
How Philanthropy Is Reshaping K-12 Education
Edited by Frederick M. Hess


Urban
School Reform
LESSONS FROM SAN DIEGO
Edited by Frederick M. Hess


A
QUALIFIED TEACHER
IN
Every
Classroom?
Appraising
Old Answers
and
New Ideas
Edited by
Frederick M. Hess, Andrew J. Rotherham, and Kate Walsh

To order, call 1-888-437-1437 or visit us online at www.harvardeducationpress.org

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

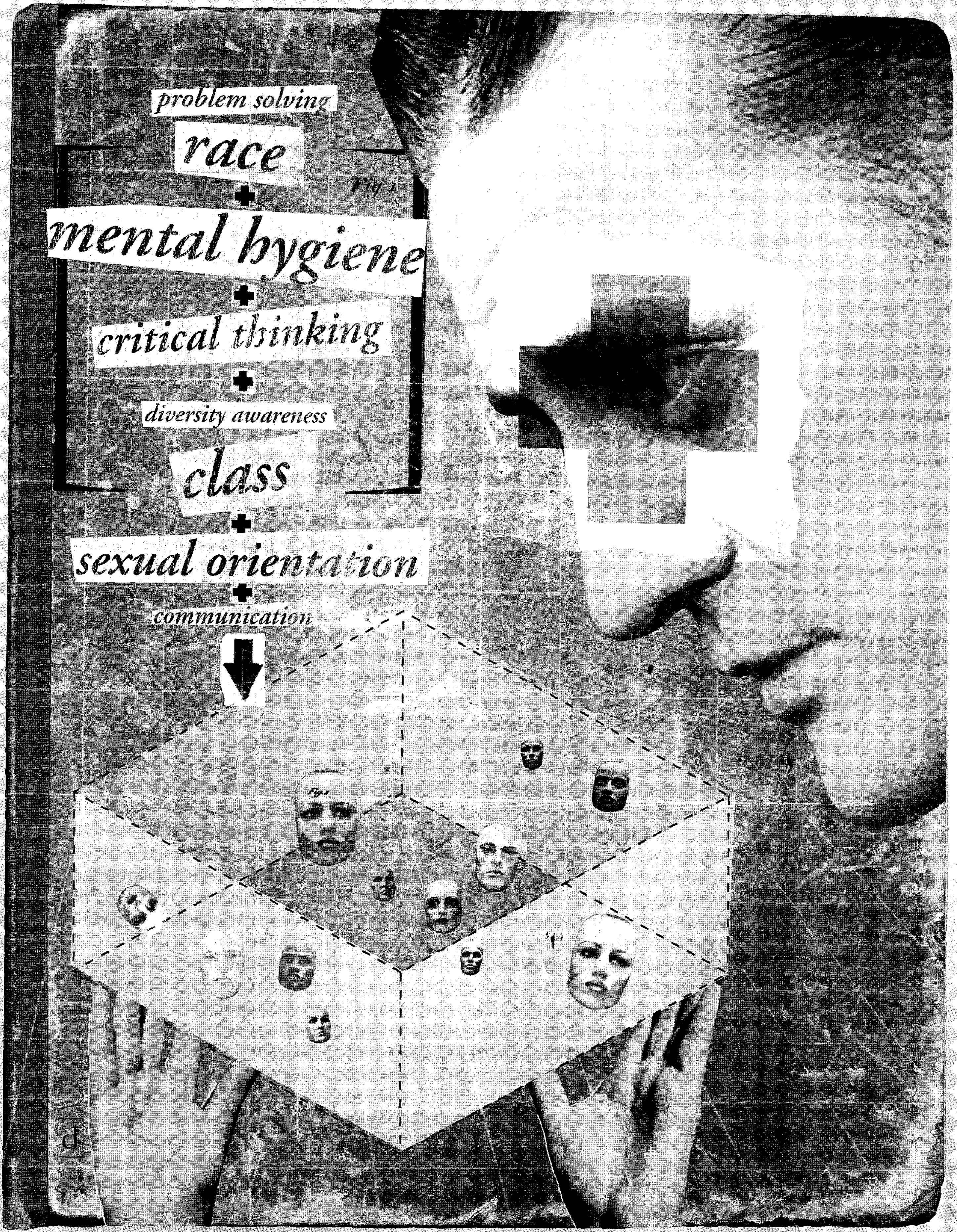

problem solving
race
mental hygiene
critical thinking
diversity awareness
class
sexual orientation
communication

ILLUSTRATION / DAVID VOGIN

Return of the Thought Police?

The history of teacher attitude adjustment

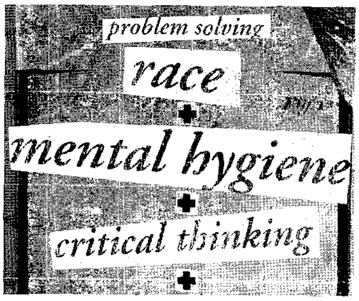
College campus battles over academic freedom and free speech have become a media staple. One widely publicized 2004 case concerned Ed Swan, an education student at Washington State University (WSU), who openly espoused conservative views, including opposition to affirmative action and permitting gays to adopt. The school's "professional disposition evaluation" required that students demonstrate, along with a professional demeanor, written communication, and problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, an "understanding of the complexities of race, power, gender, class, sexual orientation and privilege in American society."

Refusing to consent to the underlying ideology, Swan failed repeatedly. The college threatened to expel him from the teacher training program unless he signed a contract agreeing to undergo diversity training and accept extra scrutiny of his student teaching. After a national civil-liberties group intervened on his behalf, Swan was allowed to continue in the program, and WSU has since revised its evaluation form. The new version requires professors to evaluate students' "willingness to consider multiple perspectives on social and institutional factors that can impede or enhance students' learning." Dean of Education Judy Mitchell explained, "We've changed the format and clarified the words, but we haven't changed the standards."

BY LAURIE MOSES HINES

Advocates of dispositions assessments of the kind in place at WSU defend the screening of pre-service teachers, whether at program entry or later on in the certification process, as standard practice and argue that "dispositions" are merely those attitudes and behaviors necessary to successful teaching. Critics see the combination of program accreditation standards, revised by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 2000; a growing curricular emphasis on "social justice" issues; and a left-leaning education professoriate as yielding a one-sided approach to teacher education and the certification of teachers based on ideology, rather than teaching skills or mastery of content knowledge.

As a historian, I am most struck by the parallels between the dispositions assessments of today's aspiring teachers and the evaluations of teachers' mental hygiene and personality that began in the 1940s and continued for two decades. As is the case today, from 1940 to 1960 teacher educators sought to protect the interests of schoolchildren by socially engineering "desirable" characteristics in their teachers. What have changed are the personal qualities deemed most important for success in the classroom.



The harshest critics of dispositions assessment accuse education schools of acting as ideological gatekeepers to employment in public schools.

Assessing Teacher Dispositions

What is the purpose of dispositions assessment? What entity or body is in the best position to make this assessment? If the purpose is to ensure that access to children is denied to those who are truly deviant (sexual predators) or those who could harm children (drug dealers, felony offenders, child abusers), then it seems the assessment is best made by the government, which has the resources and responsibility to identify these people. If the purpose is to ensure that potential teachers have basic characteristics like honesty or fairness, existing standards such as university honor codes in higher education should suffice. If the purpose is to see how a teacher acts in a certain environment (be it an urban, suburban, or rural school, with a diverse or homogeneous student body), then perhaps those in that environment can best perform that assessment, taking into account the standards, mores, and preferences of the community. The ultimate employers of teachers, local school districts, can and do screen for the characteristics they want in their employees. Why, then, is it also necessary for teacher educators to assess the personal and political beliefs of aspiring teachers? Perhaps the policing of teacher personality and dispositions is just a way for teacher educators to extend their control even further into the public school classroom.

The harshest critics of dispositions assessment accuse education schools of acting as ideological gatekeepers to employment in public schools. Indeed, web site after web site shows schools of education that list among their teacher-education program goals the inculcation of political views alongside intellectual curiosity and such work habits as punctuality. The University of Alabama's College of Education is "committed to preparing individuals to promote social justice, to be change agents, and to recognize individual and institutional racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism...." In the teacher education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, students are asked to "act as leaders and agents for organizational change in their classrooms, schools, and society...continually examine their own identities, biases, and social locations, seeking knowledge of students' cultures and communities, and pursuing a complex understanding of societal inequities as mediated through classism, heterosexism, racism, and other systems of advantage." Some program descriptions explain that requiring awareness of these issues and a commitment to addressing them ensures teachers will teach *all* children. In an October 2006 letter defending the conceptual framework of Teachers College, Columbia University, against accusations of political screening, President Susan H. Furhman wrote, "We believe that responsiveness to the diversity of students' backgrounds and previous experiences are [sic] essential for effective teaching" (see Figure 1).

Not all universities make the leap from classroom behavior to ideology: The "Teacher Education Professional Dispositions and Skills Criteria" at Winthrop University in South Carolina are only basic indicators of professional commitment, communication skills, interpersonal skills (among them, "Shows sensitivity to all students and is committed to teaching all students"), emotional maturity, and academic integrity; acknowledging social inequities is not mentioned. The difficulty, however, in assessing dispositions, whether they espouse social justice or are seemingly harmless as at Winthrop, arises when the assessors make value judgments rather than encourage academic freedom and respect freedom of conscience. As the Swan case at Washington State University shows, some teacher education programs clearly demand allegiance to a particular perspective on the politics of education.

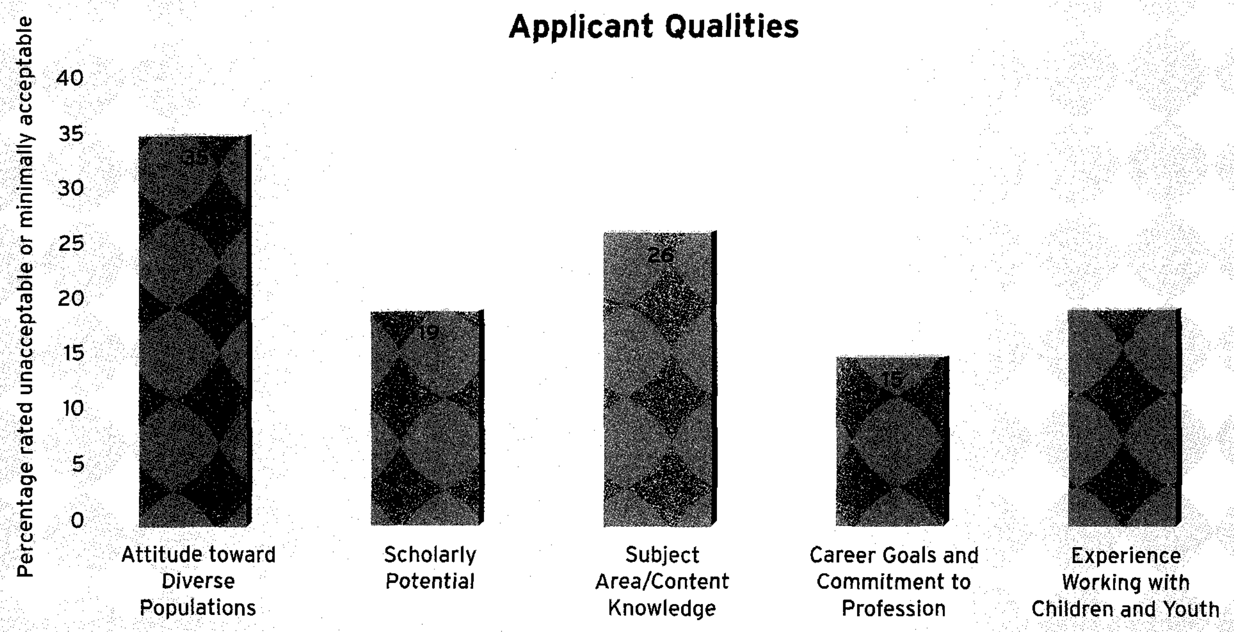
If schools encourage students to respond honestly to teacher education assignments, and then use any responses that differ from accepted beliefs as grounds for dismissal, that is political screening and a clear denial of academic freedom. A student accused Le Moyne College, a private, Jesuit-run school, of doing just that. In 2004, administrators dismissed the politically conservative graduate student after he wrote a paper on classroom management that questioned the value of multicultural education and expressed limited support for the use of corporal punishment in the classroom. At the Brooklyn College School of Education, some students complained after a teacher showed the Michael Moore film *Fahrenheit 9/11* on the day before the 2004 presidential election. The university asked one student to leave, accused two others of plagiarism, and then denied the two students the right to bring a witness or an attorney to their hearing. K. C. Johnson, a faculty member who questioned the accusation of plagiarism and defended the students in *Inside Higher Ed*, then faced possible investigation by the university. The hallmarks of a professional program of teacher preparation within a university should be the free exploration of ideas. Yet it seems some teacher preparation programs substitute professional socialization, and the political conformity it requires, for a commitment to academic freedom.

The controversy over political screening of prospective teachers by teacher educators came to a head at the June 2006 reauthorization hearing for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) with the U.S. Department of Education. Within the list of dispositions aspiring teachers might be required to possess, the agency had included "social justice," a phrase that, to many, signals a value-laden ideology. Under pressure from a number of groups, NCATE president Arthur Wise announced that the agency would drop "social justice" from its accreditation standards; he maintains that social justice was never a required disposition.

NCATE's definition of "dispositions" and its inclusion of social justice as part of that definition had caused considerable consternation. Among the groups represented at the hearing were the National Association of Scholars, which had filed the complaint, and the Foundation for Individual Rights

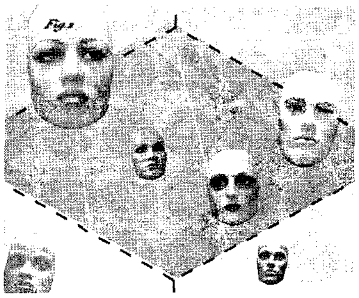
High Standards—on Attitudes, at Least (Figure 1)

In a 2004 review of applicants to its teacher education programs, Teachers College, Columbia University, found a greater proportion wanting in commitment to diversity than in any other assessed quality.



SOURCE: Teachers College Accreditation Team, "Institutional Report: Prepared for NCATE Board of Examiners Visit, April 2–6, 2005" in Education (FIRE), founded and headed by civil libertarians Alan Charles Kors, professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, and Harvey Silverglate, a criminal defense attorney. FIRE, an organization dedicated to the preservation of free speech, has accused a number of universities, including Washington State University on behalf of Edward Swan, of evaluating students on the basis of their political views and thereby violating their First Amendment rights.

Arthur Wise has staked out NCATE's position that dispositions are only "commonsense expectations" for teacher behavior and insists that the accrediting agency does not condone the evaluation of attitudes. Whether or not that is the case, most teacher education programs in this country receive accreditation from NCATE and follow its lead. Even though NCATE has now dropped "social justice" as a disposition, the agency stands behind dispositions assessment and institutions' use of "social justice" as a curricular theme. The phrase appears in countless teacher-preparation program and course descriptions. Critics are not hopeful that NCATE's action will curb abuses. In her testimony at the NCATE hearing, American Council of Trustees and Alumni president Anne D. Neal asked that the agency's reauthorization be denied "until it affirmatively makes clear that teacher preparation programs are not expected to judge the values and political beliefs of teacher candidates and asks that its members review and revise their standards accordingly."



A century ago, female teachers could not socialize with men while unchaperoned. They could not marry. Violation could cost a teacher her job.

Judging Fitness Is Nothing New

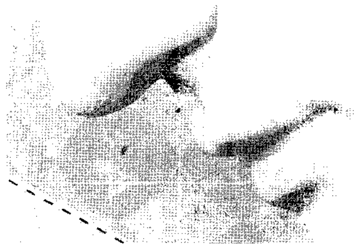
Society has long been concerned with the behavior, both inside and outside of the classroom, and the character of public school teachers. A century ago, local school boards carefully selected school teachers they deemed "fit to teach," whose behavior comported with community values. They could not smoke or drink. Female teachers could not socialize with men while unchaperoned. They could not marry. They were not to display or engage in behaviors considered deviant, such as lesbianism. They were to dress conservatively and attend church. Violation could cost a teacher her job.

School officials and boards also scrutinized teachers' political views. During World War I, the superintendent of the Cleveland public schools suggested firing those teachers sympathetic to Germany, and anti-war teachers did lose their jobs in New York City. In the 1920s and 1930s, more than a dozen states, typically those in which there were anti-communist crusades, required teachers to take loyalty oaths.

In public-school classrooms, as educational progressivism steadily gained influence during the first half of the 20th century, the focus in classrooms gradually shifted from rigorous academic study and discipline to children's personality development and mental health. Education historian Sol Cohen describes the "medicalization" of education as the "infiltration of psychiatric norms, concepts and categories of discourse" into American education. Cohen reports that by 1950, there was "a national consensus on the role of personality development in American education" and that this included the view that "the school is basically an institution to develop children's personality and that personality development of children should take priority over any other school objective."

Attention turned as well toward the "mental hygiene" of the teacher, whose actions and attitudes would no doubt influence the children in her charge. As Douglas Spencer, instructor of psychological counseling at Teachers College, Columbia University, wrote in 1938, the teacher was to "demonstrate in her own personality adjustment sound mental health and emotional maturity." As the 1940s began, a growing chorus of educators called for teacher qualification and selection to be based on mental health, first and foremost, and many expected this to be achieved through the teacher education process. However, market pressures on teacher education institutions made this problematic. Government policies provided tax funds for training teachers through the publicly supported teachers colleges, which did not have selective admissions requirements. Meanwhile, the number of both school-age children and college attendees grew steadily, with more than one-quarter of college degrees being granted in the field of education.

The rapid expansion of the teaching workforce hindered efforts to select teachers on mental hygienic grounds, even before the teacher shortage that developed in the 1950s. Reports of teachers with mental disturbances and even mental illnesses made professional and public headlines throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Public concern grew about maladjusted or neurotic teachers and their inability to ensure the proper psychological development of the children under their tutelage. Some feared that, as with contagious disease, psychological disorders would spread from teacher to child. Various personality traits of the maladjusted teacher emerged in the literature of the time. Shy, nervous, timid, easily excitable, disorganized, irresponsible, introverted, sexually repressed, or hot-tempered teachers were considered unfit for the classroom. A 1961 text, *The Mentally Disturbed Teacher*, documented purportedly true incidents about such teachers, suggesting that teachers who used corporal punishment could be mentally ill or that irritability in a teacher may be a sign of alcoholism, to take two examples. One suggestion for improving the mental health of the teaching body was for schools to keep a record of the teacher's "attainments and attitudes," including her cultural background and her community leadership.



As early as the 1940s, teacher education institutions began to use rating scales, placement tests, and personal interviews as screening devices for measuring teacher personality.

As early as the 1940s, teacher education institutions began to use rating scales, placement tests, and personal interviews as screening devices for measuring mental hygiene and teacher personality. For some assessments, candidates filled out questionnaires; for others, faculty, administrators, or psychologists observed the teacher and made judgments. The University of Utah required teacher candidates to take the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Strong Vocational Interest Blank. The College of Education at the State College of Washington used the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory. Still other institutions employed a variety of assessment measures, such as the Rorschach test, James Cattell's 16 Factor Personality test, the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey, the Thurstone Temperament Schedule, and a host of other batteries designed to explore the teacher's behavior, personality, and attitude.

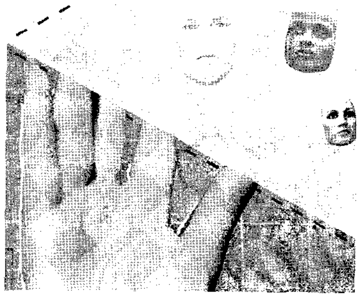
In 1953, Ruth A. Stout, director of field programs at Kansas State Teachers Association and later professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, completed a comprehensive study of admission practices in teacher education institutions. Stout surveyed 785 of 865 accredited teacher-training schools and found that a majority identified emotional stability as being of primary importance and that approximately 45 percent actually assessed students' emotional stability, identifying it as the second most important criterion for determining fitness for teaching, behind academic credentials. Assessment of emotional stability became more important, Stout reported, as students progressed through their teaching preparation, with more institutions using it to determine admission to student teaching than to the teacher education program.

Research on Teacher Personality

Experimental and statistical research on personality development exploded onto the 1940s education scene, replacing earlier anecdotal surveys. The *Journal of Experimental Education* and the *Journal of Educational Research* published much of this research, which used psychological or personality indexes to "scientifically" determine the relationship between personality and "good teaching." The ultimate goal was to connect personal traits with teaching effectiveness, thus enabling better selection of teacher candidates. Sometimes, researchers measured teacher success based on the observation of classroom supervisors. At other times, they used data on students' class rank, college grades, or other measures of student performance.

The results of the research were as diverse as the assessment instruments used. Some found good teachers were more gregarious, adventurous, frivolous, artistic, polished, cheerful, kind, and interested in the opposite sex than teachers rated poorer in performance. Others found good teachers to be those whose attitudes were positive toward children and administrators. A few studies that tried to correlate teacher factors (both intelligence and personality) with effectiveness found teaching too complex to be influenced by any one or two factors. Nonetheless, institutions pushed forward with the use of personality tests to select among teacher candidates, often using multiple indexes, even as critics warned that some instruments had low predictive validity, that there was inconsistency in results, or that the lack of replication warranted cautious use.

In a 1956 review of the research on "School Personnel and Mental Health," J. T. Hunt, a professor at the University of North Carolina, noted that "efforts to identify personality differences between superior and inferior school personnel, to isolate a 'teacher personality,' or to predict either competence or effectiveness of student teachers by means of psychometric or projective instruments, led to limited results." Unlike most of the research he reviewed, Hunt recognized that personality was not a monolithic attribute, as there were many kinds and types of teacher personalities and roles. More presciently, Hunt called for research that would consider the "varying value standards of judges." "Very little attention seems to have been paid," he concluded, "to the actual attitudes and expectations of persons" who assess teachers. He called for research that placed university administrators under the personality microscope.



Without definitive criteria for good teaching, the personality indexes used in teacher personality research had no validity.

University of Chicago professors Jacob Warren Getzels and P. W. Jackson in 1960 followed Berkeley professor Fred Tyler's lead in arguing that no consensus existed among researchers, and presumably educators generally, as to what was considered good teaching. Getzels and Jackson pointed out that the authoritarian teaching style considered "good" at the end of the 19th century had given way to the personal style brought into vogue with progressive education, which would in time give way to another. Without definitive criteria for good teaching, the personality indexes used in teacher personality research had no validity. The tests, they claimed, were chosen for "irrelevant reason" or for "no apparent reason at all." Thus, the entire design of research on teacher personality was flawed.

Mental Hygiene as Curriculum

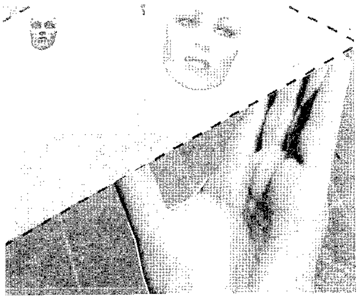
The mental hygiene perspective nonetheless held sway throughout the 1950s, and the concept of personality became as important in teacher education as academic and technical preparation for the classroom—as important as content knowledge and skills. The separation of the teacher into "technician" and "personality," a distinction noted by mental hygienist Harry Rivlin in 1955, required that teacher education prepare students along both lines. Teacher educators often prioritized personality over other aspects of a teacher's abilities.

In 1955, Percival Symonds, professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he taught mental hygiene, headed a study publicized by the Council for Research in the Social Sciences of Columbia University. His study recommended "a change in emphasis in teacher-training from intellectual courses to experiences for the better personal adjustment of teachers." For a decade, Symonds had promoted the inclusion of psychotherapeutic principles and methods in the mental hygienic treatment of teacher maladjustment. He used psychotherapy in his classes; his students wrote autobiographies and he analyzed them. As he noted in a *Newsweek* article, he "first gained the pupil's confidence to a point where they would feel free enough to drag all the family skeletons out of the closet"; of course, he found maladjustment everywhere. According to a 1955 *Education* article by Leon Mones, then an assistant superintendent in Newark, New Jersey, and a former principal, Symonds and others were openly advocating that the emotional life of the teacher become the focus of teacher preparation, since "it is the teacher's personality that is the tool with which he works rather than the content in which he gives instruction."

Educational psychology courses aimed at understanding children were standard fare for teacher preparation in the 1920s. But even by the mid-1940s, the goal of psychology coursework had become the teacher's own mental health. Bank Street College of Education in New York, San Francisco State College, the University of Texas, and the University of Wisconsin incorporated lectures on mental health with "psychiatrically supervised individual guidance" of pre-service teachers. The experimental use of psychoanalysis in teacher education even received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health.

At Bank Street College, teacher educator and director of research Barbara Biber extolled the virtues of a program that applied "the concept of the unified nature of cognitive and affective development...on the teacher-training level" and was based on "a process of integrating new knowledge with an old self." Bank Street faculty members looked for certain dispositions in their candidates: relatedness to children, an orientation to the psychology of growth, their relation to authority, their emotional strength, and their motivation. The Institute for Child Study at the University of Maryland emphasized the ideal of the "self-actualized individual" in its graduate-level instruction. A human relations seminar at the Merrill-Palmer School aimed "to help the individual teacher express and explore the values, meanings, and dynamics of personal and professional experiences, to achieve self-awareness, and to develop sensitive, understanding, responsive attitudes."

Still, psychiatrists reported that teachers, especially novices, did not know how to handle their negative feelings. I. N. Berlin, a professor of psychiatry and psychiatric consultant to school districts in San Francisco, San Joaquin County, and Stockton, California, argued that some mental pathologies that were causal factors in teacher maladjustment and ineffectiveness in the classroom were, unfortunately, exacerbated rather than alleviated by teacher education. Berlin's criticism of teacher training reflected the belief of some psychiatrists that there were limits to teacher education's ability to ensure mentally healthy teachers.



The screening of prospective teachers for maladjustment 50 years ago and the dispositions assessments going on today have remarkable similarities.

Learning from History

The screening of prospective teachers for maladjustment 50 years ago and the dispositions assessments going on today have remarkable similarities. As William Damon of Stanford has noted, dispositions assessment "opens virtually all of a candidate's thoughts and actions to scrutiny...[and] brings under the examiner's purview a key element of the candidate's very *personality*." The same underlying assumption—that scientific means of selection and training could guarantee good teachers—held sway at mid-century with respect to mental hygiene. Teacher educators who guarded entry to the profession used the techniques of science to study, measure, and evaluate the teacher candidate as do those who guard entry today. Only the specific values and attitudes they appraise have changed. Advocates of dispositions assessment claim that their methods are "standards-based" and provide "accountability"—scientific-sounding catchwords that hold considerable weight in the current political climate. Both sets of desirable characteristics—summed up in the terms mental hygiene and social justice—are tied to progressivism and appear as core components of the teacher preparation curriculum, with the effect of deemphasizing academic knowledge, or at least requiring subject-matter learning and even pedagogy to make room for them. And hard evidence was and still is lacking. Researchers could never link with any certainty particular personality traits with effective teaching. Nor, as Frederick Hess explains, is there any scientific evidence that requiring teachers to have certain views about "sexuality or social class" ensures that they teach all students: "Screening on 'dispositions' serves primarily to cloak academia's biases in the garb of professional necessity."

The history of teacher screening reveals how deeply rooted such practices are in American teacher education. Whether the standard is mental hygiene or possessing the proper political and ideological disposition, the elimination of candidates who do not pass muster gives teacher educators the power to determine who gains access to a classroom based on the values the teacher educators prefer. While the courts have permitted certifying agencies to require "good moral character" of teacher applicants, as legal scholars Martha McCarthy and Nelda Cambron-McCabe note, they "will intervene...if statutory or constitutional rights are abridged." Thus, while pledging loyalty to federal and state constitutions is a permissible condition for obtaining a teacher license, swearing an oath to progressivism is not. Given the evidence and the history, there should be real concern, as teacher educator Gary Galluzzo has said, that "students' views and personalities are being used against them" whenever dispositions are assessed. Those committed to academic freedom within higher education should be concerned when professional socialization trumps freedom of conscience in teacher education programs.

Laurie Moses Hines is assistant professor at Kent State University Trumbull campus, where she teaches in the Cultural Foundations of Education program and in the history department.

THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE PROUDLY ANNOUNCES THE

2007 Olive W. Garvey Fellowships

Garvey Fellowships will be awarded for the best essays on the topic:

"Is Foreign Aid the Solution to Global Poverty?"

A U.N. report has called for a doubling of foreign aid to poor countries as the means to reduce poverty. Yet the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the for-profit microloan bank, Grameen Bank, and its founder, Muhammad Yunus, an apparent vindication of the ideas of P. T. Bauer, Harry G. Johnson, Deepak Lal, and others. As Bauer wrote, "Development aid, far from being necessary to rescue poor societies from a vicious circle of poverty, is far more likely to keep them in that state.... Emergence from poverty requires effort, firmly established property rights, and productive investment."

STUDENT CATEGORY:

For essays of no more than 3,000 words

First Prize:	**$2,500**
Second Prize:	**$1,500**
Third Prize:	**$1,000**

FACULTY CATEGORY:

For essays of 5,000 to 8000 words

First Prize:	**$10,000**
Second Prize:	**$5,000**
Third Prize:	**$1,500**

Essays may be submitted by college students (undergraduate or graduate) or junior faculty members (assistant professor or higher, untenured), 35 years of age or younger. Deadline: May 1, 2007.

The INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

For complete entry details, contact:
The Independent Institute
100 Swan Way, Oakland, CA 94621-1428
510-632-1366 • Fax: 510-568-6040
Email: Garvey@independent.org
www.independent.org/students/garvey

Look for *The Independent Review* on better newsstands and in bookstores!

Debunking a Special Education Myth

Don't blame private options for rising costs

Checked by Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters

Can spiraling special education costs explain why educational achievement remained stagnant over the past three decades while real education spending more than doubled? Policy makers, education researchers, and school district officials often make this claim. Special education students—goes the argument—are draining resources away from regular education students.

In 1975, the federal government enacted the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires states to provide a "free appropriate public education" to all students with disabilities. Parents have the right to work with school officials to devise an individualized education plan for their child. They also have the right to pursue legal action if they and the district cannot agree on what services their child will receive and whether the public school or a private provider will deliver those services. Since the implementation of the federal law and subsequent state laws, the percentage of students in the nation identified as requiring special education has risen sharply, from 8.3 percent of all students in 1977 to about 13.7 percent in 2004, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Table 1
Private Special Education Placements, 2003-04

State	Number	% of Total Enrollment
United States	88,156	0.18
District of Columbia	2,160	3.03
New Jersey	12,270	0.90
Rhode Island	1,366	0.85
Massachusetts	6,214	0.64
New Hampshire	1,156	0.56
Connecticut	2,967	0.52
Maryland	4,110	0.47
Vermont	473	0.47
New York	13,168	0.46
Maine	730	0.36
Illinois	6,386	0.31
South Dakota	386	0.30
Pennsylvania	5,033	0.27
California	15,432	0.24
Virginia	2,092	0.18
Arkansas	792	0.18
Colorado	1,314	0.18
North Dakota	144	0.14
Arizona	1,159	0.12
Oklahoma	746	0.12
Wyoming	92	0.10
Missouri	954	0.10
Hawaii	175	0.09
Montana	140	0.09
Minnesota	751	0.09
Delaware	103	0.09
Oregon	466	0.08
Mississippi	374	0.08
Ohio	1,314	0.07
Alabama	527	0.07
Indiana	710	0.07
Nebraska	187	0.07
Iowa	295	0.06
West Virginia	169	0.06
Tennessee	510	0.05
Kansas	229	0.05
Alaska	53	0.04
Florida	850	0.03
Idaho	83	0.03
Washington	310	0.03
Wisconsin	253	0.03
South Carolina	185	0.03
Kentucky	166	0.03
Michigan	456	0.03
North Carolina	295	0.02
Louisiana	87	0.01
New Mexico	35	0.01
Georgia	90	0.01
Texas	198	0.00
Nevada	1	0.00
Utah	0	0.00

Note: Data based on the December 1, 2003 count, updated as of July 31, 2004.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS)

The "Two-Step"

A popular riff on the idea that special education students are bleeding public school budgets blames private placements. A large number of mostly undeserving disabled students and their clever parents, critics allege, have managed to get public schools to pay for attendance at expensive private schools. Tales of the "greedy needy"—disabled students who receive unreasonably expensive services—appear regularly in the media. The *San Francisco Chronicle* describes the case of a student with learning disabilities and an anxiety disorder whose parents "enrolled him in a $30,000-a-year prep school in Maine—then sent the bill to their local public school district." The *Chronicle* declares that similar situations are "playing out up and down California as more parents of special education students seek extra-special education at public expense: private day schools, boarding schools, summer camps, aqua therapy, horseback therapy, travel costs, personal aides and more." The *Chronicle* cites a school finance consultant to the California Department of Education to make the harm to general education parents clear: "This is not sustainable... Special education is a growing portion of budgets in many districts, squeezing out services for other pupils."

Time magazine relates a story about an autistic child whose parents put him in an expensive private school and then "informed Colorado's Thompson school district it had to pick up the bill for Boston Higashi's $135,000 annual tuition." *Time* warns, "Special ed costs threaten to eat into budgets for school endeavors that are not federally mandated, like athletics or the gifted-and-talented program. The money has to come from somewhere, says Becky Jay, who was president of the local school board when the [family] first asked for tuition reimbursement, 'and regular kids lose out.'"

The New York Times does a similar dance routine. The paper profiles a wealthy community—Westport, Connecticut—where "some [special education students] are getting as little as a few hours of weekly speech therapy. Others get tuition for private school or home tutoring." The superintendent, we are told, has held the line on special education services: "His administration has denied many special education requests—horseback riding and personal trainers, for instance—that it deemed extravagant." Again, we are warned that runaway special education costs pose a threat: "The strain on the bottom line can be intense, even in Westport, where in the 2002–03 school year the $10.9 million spent on special education consumed 15.9 percent of the district's education spending."

It's a two-step. First, provide colorful anecdotes of unreasonably expensive-sounding private placement, and then warn about how general education may suffer.

As it turns out, the evidence contradicts the private placement myth. Only a very small fraction of disabled students are placed in private schools at public expense. And contrary to claims that this is increasingly common, the likelihood that disabled students will be placed in a private school has not grown in the last 15 years. While some of those private placements are indeed expensive, the overall cost of private placement nationwide constitutes a tiny portion of public school spending.

The Extent of Private Placement

The media dance would be an engaging one if the plural of anecdote were data. But the data on private placement are actually dancing to a very different tune. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs tracks the number of private placements. The information for each state and by disability classification is posted on its web site. We have reproduced the relevant information in Table 1.

As of 2004, private schools served, at public expense, a total of 88,156 students with disabilities of the 5,963,129 students with disabilities nationally, which amounts to 1.48 percent. And these privately placed students amounted to 0.18 percent of the 47,917,774 students enrolled in public education. Nor has the percentage of students who are privately placed substantially increased in recent years. According to the *Digest of Education Statistics*, a similar proportion, about 1.6 percent, of students receiving services under IDEA were educated in a private school setting in 1989. The percentage of all students who were privately placed has increased slightly since then, due to an increase in the percentage of students diagnosed as disabled, but there has been no surge in the proportion of special education students in private settings.

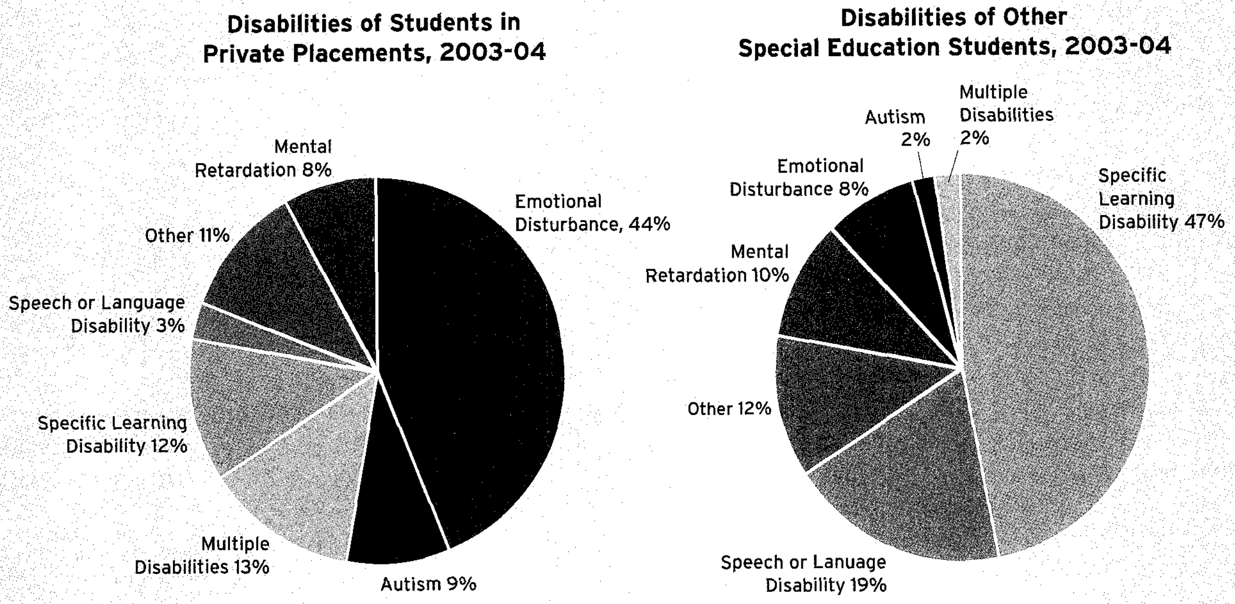
The fact is that private placement is extremely rare.

Instances of private placement that occur as a result of parental requests rather than at the initiative of school districts appear to be even more rare. In many cases, public schools simply do not have the facilities or staff to accommodate students with certain disabilities, and those students are sent by the public schools to specialized private schools. For example, some public schools are incapable of serving blind and deaf students, who constituted 3,022 of the 88,156 privately placed students in 2004. Another 19,876 students in private placements are mentally retarded, have multiple disabilities, or have suffered a traumatic brain injury. The lion's share of the 38,510 emotionally disturbed students attending private school at public expense were also likely sent because public school officials believed that they were unable to handle the students' needs. The number of private placements for students with mild disabilities that resulted from parental action is likely to be a very small portion of the 88,156 students in private placements. (See Figure 1 for a breakout of private placements by disability.) Media

Only a very small fraction of disabled students are placed in private schools at public expense. And contrary to claims that this is increasingly common, the likelihood that disabled students will be placed in a private school has not grown in the last 15 years.

Differently Abled (Figure 1)

Overall, students in private placement look quite different from other special education students and are much more likely to be classified as autistic, experiencing "emotional disturbance," or having multiple disabilities. Public school special education students are more likely to have a "specific learning disability" or a "speech or language disability."



Disabilities of Students in Private Placements, 2003-04

Disabilities of Other Special Education Students, 2003-04

Note: "Other" disabilities include blind-deafness, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, developmental delay, traumatic brain injury, hearing impairments, and all other health problems.

SOURCE: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2006 data, IDEAdata.org

reports are often just the tip of the iceberg, but in this case there may not be much more beneath the waterline.

Evidence on Cost

Perhaps the private placement of disabled students is so expensive that it still diverts significant resources from general education. To estimate the additional cost involved in placing disabled students in private schools, we relied on a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. According to the Special Education Expenditure Project, the average cost of a private placement in 2000 was $25,580. The project report also provides the average cost of serving students in a public school setting, broken out by disability type (e.g., specific learning disability, mental retardation, autism, etc.). Weighting the costs by the type of disabilities among students placed in private schools, we can estimate that the average privately placed student would have cost $15,117 if he had instead been served in a public school. That is, we estimate that private placement cost an additional $10,463 per student.

This estimate likely overstates by a fair margin the additional cost of serving disabled students in private schools. It assumes that the cost of serving a privately placed student would be the same as the cost of serving the average student with the same disability. But we have good reason to believe that most privately placed students are more severely disabled and therefore more expensive to educate than the average student in the same disability classification. An emotionally disturbed student who requires private placement, for example, is likely to be more challenging and expensive to educate than the average emotionally disturbed student who remains in public schools. With the law's emphasis on providing services in the least restrictive environment, the severity of the disability is likely to increase the probability of private placement.

Given the conservative estimate of $10,463 per pupil as the additional cost of private placement and given 88,156 privately placed students, the total additional cost of placing disabled students in private schools may be as high as $922 million. This sounds

Blaming Special Education

Following anecdotes about expensive and unreasonable-sounding private placements, news stories often segue into reports of the total cost of special education—not private placement costs per se. Perhaps special education as a whole is the legitimate target of complaint.

This claim also appears at odds with the facts. It is true that special education enrollments have been increasing at a rapid rate, but that doesn't mean special education costs are rising faster than the resources available for regular education. To estimate the relative burden of providing special education services over time, we use information on the cost of these services by disability type reported by the Special Education Expenditure Project. We know the number of students in each disability classification over time from the U.S. Department of Education's *Digest of Education Statistics*. If we multiply the number of students in each disability category by the cost of services in each disability, we can estimate the total cost of special education services.

Of course, we only have information on the costs per disabled student from a recent study, and it is possible that the cost of serving students in each disability classification has increased in real terms over time. To adjust for this, we assume that the change in the real cost of special education services is commensurate with the change in student-teacher ratios. Making that adjustment, special education services cost roughly $17.7 billion in 1977, when federal protection for special education began; spending almost doubled to $34.3 billion by 2003 as the number of students in special education increased by 76 percent.

The near doubling in special education costs is not attributable to a rise in rare and expensive disabilities. Media reports often emphasize the growth in students with autism but their numbers remain very small, less than 0.3 percent of enrollment. The total cost of special education services for autism does not exceed 0.45 percent of all spending. Severe disability categories like mental retardation, which are costly to serve, have actually experienced a decline in enrollment. The bulk of special education cost increases comes from explosive growth in the specific learning disability (SLD) category, which is among the least costly to serve. Students in this category grew from 796,000 in 1977 to 2,848,000 in 2003.

Still, the large cost increase doesn't mean that special education is taking away more resources from general education. Total revenue for public education also nearly doubled between 1977 and 2003, adjusted for inflation. Special education costs constituted roughly the same share of total public school revenue (8.3 percent) in 2003 as in 1977. While special education does consume more money over time, the relative financial burden of special education on public education has not increased because public schools are also receiving significantly more money.

— Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters

like a lot of money, but to public schools it is almost a rounding error. In the school year ending in 2000, the same year as our cost estimates, public schools spent $382 billion. The $922 million for private placement amounts to just 0.24 percent of the total budget. The cost of family-driven private placement is certainly less.

The Exceptions Do Not Make the Rule

There are some school districts and states where private placement is more burdensome. In Washington, D.C., for example, privately placed students constitute 3.03 percent of enrollment as of 2004. According to the *Washington Post*, the cost of private placements represents 15 percent of the school district's budget.

But Washington, D.C., is the exception, not the rule. No state has more than 1 percent of its students privately placed. Only four states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New Jersey) have more than 0.5 percent of their students attending private schools at public expense. And to repeat, nationwide only 0.18 percent of all students are privately placed. Nor is D.C. typical for a large urban school district. According to the *New York Times*, New York City schools have 2,000 privately placed students at a cost of $24 million. That amounts to only 0.19 percent of student enrollment and only 0.17 percent of the budget.

Why do some places have an unusually large proportion of privately placed students? In Washington, D.C., the explanation might be found in the dysfunction of the school district (see "Old Wine, New Bottles," *forum*, Fall 2001, and "How Vouchers Came to D.C.," *features*, Fall 2004). The D.C. schools struggle to provide an adequate education to any of their students. Disabled students are entitled under federal law to demand an adequate education and to obtain one in a private school if the public schools are unable to provide it. The nondisabled students who remain in D.C. public schools lack the same mechanism for exiting failing schools. That is, the high rate of private placement in D.C. may be more a function of the quality of D.C. public schools than a function of special education per se.

The higher rate of private placement found in D.C. and a handful of northeastern states could also be explained by a self-reinforcing process. Once some students obtain private placements, it is easier for others to do so. A network of parents and lawyers develops as private placements become more common, spreading information about options and strategies. So private placement may beget more private placement.

If obtaining a private placement requires a battle with school officials, parents with greater awareness of their legal rights and greater resources to engage in the fight are more likely to win. Washington, D.C., and northeastern states have a high concentration of wealthy and well-educated parents. Because it is the nation's capital, D.C. has an unusually high number of lawyers, disability advocates, and policy-savvy parents.

Why So Few?

Recent evidence from Florida's McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities seems to indicate that the real question is why private placements are so rare. This program provides all students in special education with a generous voucher that they can use to attend a private school, eliminating the need for dissatisfied parents to sue their school. According to the Florida Department of Education, 16,144 students currently use a McKay Scholarship, about 4 percent of the students receiving services under IDEA. Given that only 1.48 percent of special education students are privately placed nationally, the experience with McKay suggests a pent-up demand for private schooling among the disabled.

In a phone survey, only one-third of parents who participated in the McKay program reported that they were satisfied with their child's previous public school. If these results can be generalized to other states, then why don't more parents pursue private placements? The simple answer is that it is not always easy for parents to secure their preferences if those preferences differ from the judgments of school authorities. IDEA regulations require school districts to provide services in the "least restrictive environment" possible for the child to reach full educational potential. Typically, officials consider the least restrictive environment to be the local public school.

Litigating against a school district costs time and money that many parents don't have, and school districts are increasingly willing to spend. Determined public schools can outspend and outlast almost any family. In California, school officials "fought so hard to block the claims of a student that Judge Oliver W. Wanger of United States District Court took 83 pages to berate the district's 'hard-line position' and its law firm for 'willfully and vexatiously' dragging out the case so long that the former student is now 24." Litigated cases are extremely rare; media reports of a tidal wave of special education lawsuits are contradicted by an examination of the data. In California, only 0.6 percent of students with a disability file a formal complaint over their educational services. Far fewer ever reach the courts.

In the school year ending in 2000, the same year as our cost estimates, public schools spent $382 billion. The $922 million for private placement amounts to just 0.24 percent of the total budget.

McKay as an Alternative

The McKay program offers a number of benefits. First, our evaluation found that families reported obtaining higher-quality services in a private setting with a McKay voucher than they had received in public schools. Second, McKay offers the promise of slowing growth in the percentage of students identified as disabled. It provides schools with a disincentive for over-diagnosis, as each student identified as disabled becomes a voucher-eligible student who could leave public schools and take all of the money devoted to her education with her. Third, the McKay program should help contain legal costs, both for school districts and families. And, by allowing private placement without the cost of a legal struggle, it increases access to private placement for lower-income families. We found that lower-income families used McKay vouchers to gain access to private placement at about the same rate as higher-income families.

Programs like Florida's McKay voucher for disabled students would also address the concerns that people have with the cost of private placement. The amount of the voucher is equal to what would be spent by a public school to educate a student with the same type and severity of disability. This would guarantee that private placement costs the public no more than serving the student in the public school.

Jay P. Greene is professor of education reform, University of Arkansas, and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Marcus A. Winters is senior research associate at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and doctoral fellow at the University of Arkansas.

book review

Blink. Think. Blank. Bunk.

Solid snap judgments are deeply grounded

Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking

By Malcolm Gladwell

Little, Brown, 2005, $25.95; 288 pages.

Think: Why Crucial Decisions Can't Be Made in the Blink of an Eye

By Michael R. LeGault

Threshold Editions, 2006, $24.95; 386 pages.

Blank: The Power of Not Actually Thinking at All

By Noah Tall

Harper, 2006, $11.95; 96 pages.

As reviewed by Diane Ravitch

I wish I had a dollar for every time I have heard or read a paean to the importance of critical thinking skills. (Just for fun, I Googled the phrase and came up with over one million hits.) Often, the pedagogues who champion critical thinking skills insist that such skills are of far greater value to children than "mere knowledge," "mere facts," or what they derisively refer to as "content." In other words, if students learn how to think, then it matters not at all if they never read great literature or study history.

Now along comes celebrated author Malcolm Gladwell to tell us in his bestselling *Blink* that intuition is far superior to the critical thinking skills that so many educators prize. Reflection and deep thought are out, it seems, and judgments made on the fly are in.

Not only was *Blink* a huge, long-running bestseller, but it boosted Mr. Gladwell into the ranks of megastars on the lecture circuit, where he is now paid $40,000 or so to dispense his theories to corporate executives. Gladwell's ideas refute the schools' labored efforts to teach critical thinking, which usually refers to gathering facts, reflecting on their meaning, and analyzing available evidence to reach a judgment. Instead, Gladwell celebrates instinct, first impressions, decisions made "at a glance," the power of the unconscious. If the schools were to take his advice to heart, they would soon be teaching neither knowledge nor critical thinking skills, and we could treat them as daycare centers rather than academic institutions.

Gladwell is surely a talented writer, as one would expect of a regular contributor to the *New Yorker*. He skillfully relates a series of tales intended to show the power of snap judgments. His first example involves a decision by the Getty Museum to buy a remarkably intact Greek sculpture from the 6th century B.C. for nearly $10 million. Since this investment demanded a high degree of caution, the museum hired scientists to investigate the age of the piece. The scientists probed and analyzed and concluded that the sculpture was genuine.

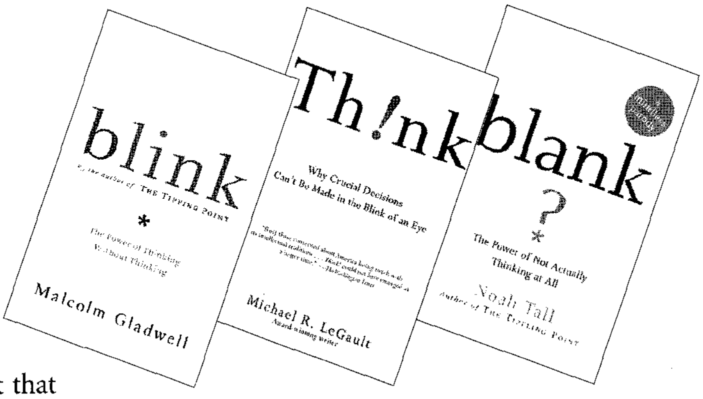
When the museum invited several art experts to look at the statue, they immediately and correctly called it a fake, based on their instincts about what was real and what was not. But in this tale, as in most of the others that Gladwell cites, the person who makes the alleged snap judgment is someone who has spent years accumulating the knowledge to make a fast and accurate decision. It was not as if the Getty called in a dozen Joe Six-Packs from the street; no, it listened with anguish to people who had spent their professional lives learning to tell the difference between real and fake.

Gladwell's argument simply doesn't hold water. Blink decisions are only worthwhile when they are made by people with years of experience. Even then, as he readily acknowledges, blink decisions are often wrong. Sometimes they are simply prejudice. Other times, they are wrong because acting on instinct can lead to wrong judgments.

The notorious killing of African immigrant Amadou Diallo in 1999 by four members of the New York City Police Department was a blink decision. The police saw Diallo late at night standing in front of an apartment building in a poor neighborhood in the Bronx. They called to him and he didn't answer. They shouted, and he reached into his pocket for his wallet. They made a snap decision that he was reaching for a gun; they drilled 41 shots into him. They were wrong, and he was dead.

Michael R. LeGault apparently had a book in the works about the decline of American culture and society and his publisher was looking for a title to hold the thing together. When Gladwell's work became a big bestseller, it seemed like good marketing sense to call LeGault's book *Think*, as if it were written in response to Gladwell. *Think* contains no primary research, no fresh insights. Mostly it is an unremitting complaint about the degradation of American life by purveyors of pop culture, pop psychology, feel-good experts, and marketing gurus.

In his book *Blank*, Noah Tall (a pseudonym) gives an excellent reason to read Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*: you can't understand the brilliant humor of *Blank* until you have read *Blink*. Tall offers an ironic version of each of Gladwell's case histories to show how ridiculous the blink judgment actually is. He, too, finds psychologists working on exotic theories of human behavior. For example, there is the TAVIACI syndrome, which means The Average Voter


blink
By the author of THE TIPPING POINT
The Power of Thinking Without Thinking
Malcolm Gladwell
Th!nk
Why Crucial Decisions Can't Be Made in the Blink of an Eye
Michael R. LeGault
blank
?
The Power of Not Actually Thinking at All
Noah Tall
Author of The Tilting Point

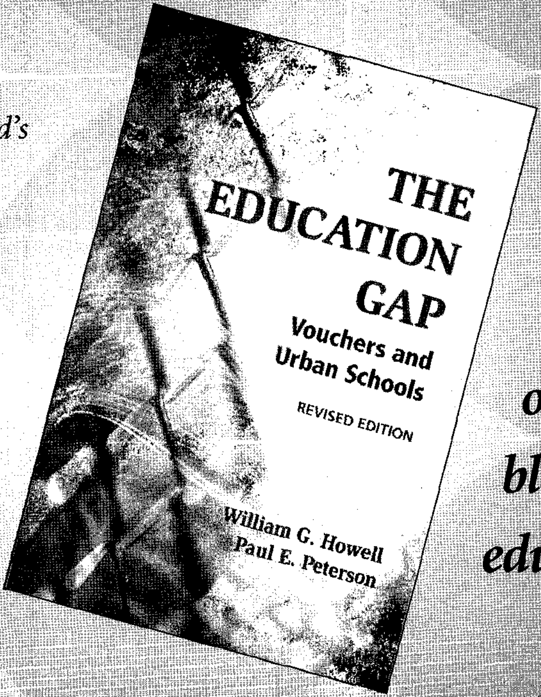
Is A Complete Idiot. "By a coincidence that can only be called extraordinary," he writes, "it was discovered by Dr. Gaetano Taviaci of Vesuvio University & Pizzeria in Naples." Even Abraham Lincoln, "an ambitious gay activist from Illinois, failed to impress voters until he started wearing a hat taller than anyone else's." That distinction enabled him to capture the entire idiot vote, which was enough to get him elected.

Then there is Dr. Ian Plegg, who mapped out "the third hemisphere" of the brain. Plegg, the first man ever to receive a doctorate in Scientology, discovered the "little-known lower sub-basement hemisphere, or the LSBH." He would have won a Nobel Prize for his work, "but some of his more envious colleagues pointed out that 'hemi' comes from the Greek meaning 'half,' and that technically you can't have a third half."

As for the Greek sculpture that fooled the Getty Museum, *Blank* transports it to the Oprah Winfrey Museum of Fine Art in Cicero, Illinois. The curator brings in the scientists, who confirm its antiquity; along comes a postal worker eating a limburger sandwich who says the statue doesn't smell right. Then a bevy of art experts declares it a fake. The curator takes it to the ultimate experts at the television program *Antiques Roadshow,* who declare it to be definitely 19th century. Having paid $9.7 million for the phony statue, the dejected curator auctions it on eBay for $2,750. (When the statue turns out to be genuine, the curator shoots himself.)

The bottom line, I surmise, is that it takes years and years of deep study to become truly expert so that you are then qualified to make snap decisions.

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education, New York University, and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.


THE EDUCATION GAP
Vouchers and Urban Schools
REVISED EDITION
William G. Howell
Paul E. Peterson

Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance

A 2006 survey of the education field's opinion-elite, conducted by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, found PEPG's voucher experiments to be among the most influential studies of the past decade.

PEPG's voucher research identified as one of 13 blockbuster education studies

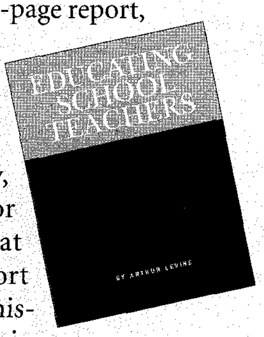
Program on Education Policy and Governance
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
Taubman 304, 79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

PEPG

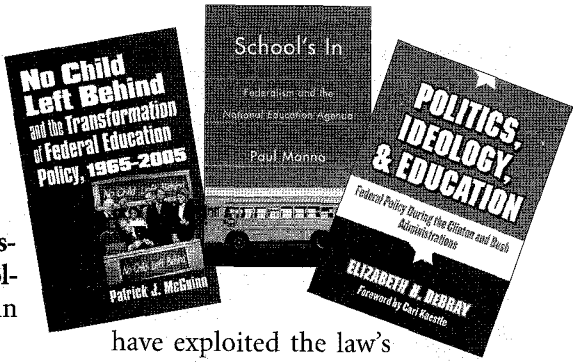
For more information about PEPG, please visit **www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg**

BOOK ALERT

Educating School Teachers. Arthur Levine (The Education Schools Project).



In this 140-page report, the former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, seeks to do for teachers what his 2005 report did for administrators: appraise the current state of their professional preparation and suggest needed reforms. The news is mostly glum: "Teacher education in the U.S. is principally a mix of poor and mediocre programs." OK, that's not news, but having Levine join the reform chorus is healthy. But how to rectify the situation? Levine makes five big policy recommendations. Most are sensible enough, but it's hard to get around the fact that neither he nor anyone else knows exactly how best to prepare future teachers and what they most need to learn. Also troubling: Levine is too close to his own industry to ask such fundamental questions as why the costly, cumbersome "paper credentialing" process that he seeks to reform is worth keeping at all, considering the plentiful evidence that uncredentialed teachers (from Teach For America, etc.) do just fine. Despite such flaws, this report is a devastating indictment of teacher education as we know it and of the institutional mechanisms (e.g., NCATE accreditation) that purport to exert quality control today.


No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005
Patrick J. McGuinn
School's In
Federalism and the National Education Agenda
Paul Manna
POLITICS, IDEOLOGY, & EDUCATION
Federal Policy During the Clinton and Bush Administrations
ELIZABETH H. DEBRAY
Foreword by Carl Kaestle

No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005. Patrick J. McGuinn (University of Kansas Press).
School's In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda. Paul Manna (Georgetown University Press).
Politics, Ideology, and Education: Federal Policy During the Clinton and Bush Administrations. Elizabeth H. DeBray (Teachers College Press).

Policymakers, reformers, and educators have all remarked on the strange bedfellows who came together to craft No Child Left Behind—and much ink has been spilled musing on the significance and implications of their efforts. Now, just in time for the law's scheduled reauthorization, three young political scientists offer the first book-length scholarly treatments of its origins.

McGuinn takes a historical approach, showing how the growing salience of education in national politics and mounting public frustration with previous federal efforts led Republicans and Democrats in Washington, D.C., to converge on a new reform agenda centered on standards and accountability. Although he concedes that the initial implementation of NCLB has been "difficult," McGuinn argues that media accounts of a nascent grass-roots backlash against the law ignore the durability of the coalition responsible for its enactment.

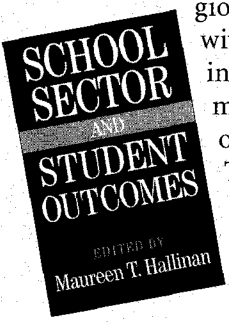
Manna emphasizes the law's roots in state reform efforts and the feds' continued reliance on the states' administrative capacities to achieve their goals. We should hardly be surprised, he suggests, that states have exploited the law's most gaping loophole by setting low targets for student performance and have aggressively lobbied for still greater flexibility.

DeBray's is the most narrowly focused account, asking why congressional gridlock during the final two years of the Clinton presidency gave way to progress in 2001. Whereas Clinton faced a GOP-dominated Congress, she argues, George W. Bush was able to bring his party's conservative wing into the fold. Despite its bipartisan support, therefore, the timing of NCLB's passage paradoxically confirms the current importance of partisanship on Capitol Hill. DeBray is also the most skeptical of the law's substance, asserting that the recent politicization of education policy has limited the presumably benign influence of researchers and practitioners.

Taken together, the books clearly demonstrate the value to political scientists of serious inquiry into the long-neglected field of education politics. For all their insights, however, the authors' reluctance to delve into the evidence on the effectiveness of alternative reform strategies leads them to ignore what are perhaps the key questions concerning the enactment of NCLB: Was the price of bipartisanship and federalism the enactment of a law that is long on aspirations but lacking in the means necessary to achieve them? If so, was the price worth paying?

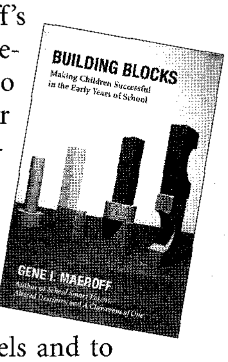
School Sector and Student Outcomes. Edited by Maureen T. Hallinan (University of Notre Dame Press).

This volume offers a scholarly look at the differences across public, private nonreligious, and private religious schools without rendering any summary findings or conclusions. The chapters generally rely on theoretical analyses, case studies, or other methods that cannot control for selection effects—ensuring that none of the findings are likely to change the minds of partisans or offer much succor to policymakers. The book's grab bag of essays explores how parental involvement, ability grouping, psychological well-being, and teachers' assessments of student effort and ability vary across sectors. There are also chapters that provide an "organizational analysis" of Toronto's private schools and a look at "cultural capital" in Chicago's Jewish schools. William Carbonaro's chapter on sectoral learning examines how much students learn during the school year and the summer. He makes a provocative case that sectoral effects vary by grade level and that different summer achievement gains of students in public and private schools are confounding comparisons of achievement across sectors. This is a volume whose greatest appeal will probably be to graduate students seeking out new research ideas.



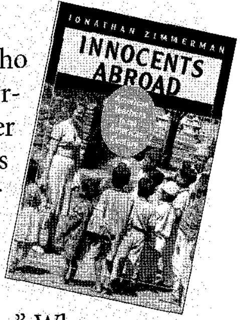
Building Blocks: Making Children Successful in the Early Years of School. Gene I. Maeroff (Palgrave Macmillan).

While there is growing interest in making preschool universal, and the nation is slowly moving in the direction of full-day kindergarten for all, Gene Maeroff, the founding director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, urges parents and policymakers to embrace a more comprehensive strategy for improving early education. The central component of Maeroff's proposal is the creation of pre-K to grade 3 schools (or pre-K–3 academies within traditional elementary schools), which will allow teachers to plan across grade levels and to participate in joint staff development, among other things. Maeroff presents an impressive collection of examples of schools and other groups doing early education well, in some cases in a pre-K–3 setting, but more often not. Inspiring though the examples are, they may not persuade a skeptical reader that the best way to improve early education for all is to harness it to the existing (if reorganized) K–12 system.



Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century. Jonathan Zimmerman (Harvard University Press).

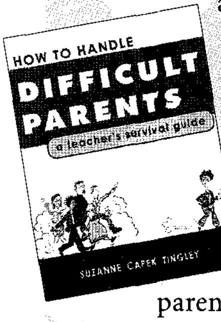
This charming history of the missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, and other idealists who taught in the four corners of the world over the past 100 years is billed by the author and publisher as an examination of our shifting understanding of "culture." Whereas teachers in the early parts of the 20th century journeyed overseas brimming with confidence in American mores and values, ready to foist them upon "backwards" peoples, by mid-century their heirs identified the United States as the regressive force, celebrating everything indigenous as superior. (Of course, neither view was correct.)



For readers interested in education, though, it offers an even more delicious treat: countless scenes of progressive teachers thwarted in their efforts to export dubious ideas (antipathy to "book learning," enthusiasm for "practical" education, obsession with "learning by doing"). Zimmerman explains: "From Chile and Colombia to China and India, people pleaded with American teachers to provide instruction in academic disciplines—especially math, science, and English—rather than the vocational subjects that the teachers often favored." What a great example of what Americans stand to learn from the rest of the world.

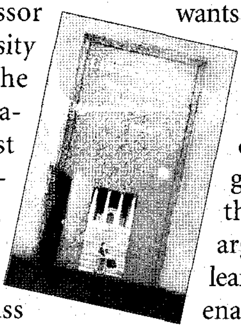
How to Handle Difficult Parents: A Teacher's Survival Guide. Suzanne Capek Tingley (Cottonwood Press).

Suzanne Capek Tingley, a current superintendent and former principal and teacher, has written a comprehensive and playful—if sometimes repetitive—handbook for teachers who are struggling with their parent relations. Her departure point is the appropriately titled chapter "A Short and Subjective History of Parents," in which she describes the gradual degrading of the parent-teacher relationship. Tingley places the blame both on parents, who pamper their kids too much, and on schools, which emphasize student self-esteem at the expense of student competition and real accomplishment.



Tingley dispenses specific advice for how to deal with some common types of the modern parent, such as "The Uncivil Libertarian," "The Intimidator," and "The Caped Crusader." Each chapter is centered on hypothetical, often amusing conversations that might transpire between the offending parent and an unfortunate teacher. If you're a teacher who develops a nervous tic ahead of parent-teacher conferences, this could be the book for you.

Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach. Nel Noddings (Cambridge University Press).



Nel Noddings, professor emerita at Stanford University and past president of the National Academy of Education, has devoted her latest tome to the daring proposition that critical thinking should be encouraged in high schools and that this requires students to discuss contentious topics. The author of volumes such as *Happiness and Education* and *The Challenge to Care in Schools* once again displays a willingness to wade fearlessly into a field of dandelions. Noddings may raise some eyebrows, however, with the "contentious" topics she would like debated. She wants schools to make students who are considering military service aware that "combat sometimes induces the loss of moral identity," wants them to challenge students to wonder "Does it lift my spirit to see the sunrise, or is waking at such an hour unthinkable?" and wants students to ask, "How do we achieve a desirable balance between our roles as citizen and consumer?" Noddings chides that "both tree huggers and tree slashers must think more deeply" and argues that "students should learn enough natural history to enable them" to craft "aesthetically pleasing alternatives to lawns." The book offers 300 pages of vapid, frequently aimless education musings that bring to mind too many popular works on teaching and curricula. Is it too much to hope that irate readers might spark a contentious debate about that?

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

PSQ is the most widely read and accessible journal of public and international affairs. Published continuously since 1886 by the Academy of Political Science, ***PSQ*** presents authoritative analysis essential to understanding today's complex world.

PSQ publishes in-depth articles on both domestic and foreign affairs, with each issue containing some 35 book reviews. Moreover, the ***Quarterly***'s editorial advisory board is composed of outstanding scholars from the nation's leading universities and think tanks.

If you haven't been reading ***PSQ***, you've missed articles and book reviews by world-class scholars, including essays on education such as *Schoolyard Revolutions: How Research on Urban School Reform Undermines Reform* by Joseph P. Viteritti and *Urban Education Reform and Minority Political Empowerment* by Stefanie Chambers.

Subscribe and receive free online access to *PSQ*'s fully searchable archive, dating back to 1996.

"Most serious journals are narrow; most journals which are broad in scope are not serious. ***PSQ*** *is the exception: a journal which is both broad in scope and serious in content. It is must reading for social scientists and informed citizens interested in public affairs."*

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON
Harvard University

SUBSCRIBE TO ***PSQ*** BY JOINING THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE.

Name ____________________
Address ____________________
City ____________________
State __________ Zip __________

Send to:
THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1274
New York, NY 10115-1274
Tel (212) 870-2500 • Fax (212) 870-2202

ACADEMY MEMBERSHIP
☐ $49, 1 year ☐ $35, student
☐ Check enclosed.
☐ Charge my: ✧ AMEX ✧ Visa ✧ MasterCard
Outside USA add $8/year.
Card # ____________________
Exp. Date ____________________
Signature ____________________

Visit *PSQ*'s website at http://www.psqonline.org

The Key to Research Influence

Quality data and sound analysis matter, after all

BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

It is notoriously difficult to determine the impact of research and scholarship on public policy. While we all might like to imagine that the perfect study, a powerful book, a trenchant article, even a well-timed op-ed might turn the tide of history, this rarely happens. And when it does, it takes eons. Consider Charles Murray's definitive work on social policy, *Losing Ground*, published 12 long years before Congress enacted welfare reform. Or George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson's 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* article "Broken Windows," which took just as long to gain traction in the nation's police departments. Or, to pick an example from education, the late Milton Friedman's voucher proposal (circa 1955), which wasn't implemented in any form until Milwaukee's program began in 1990.

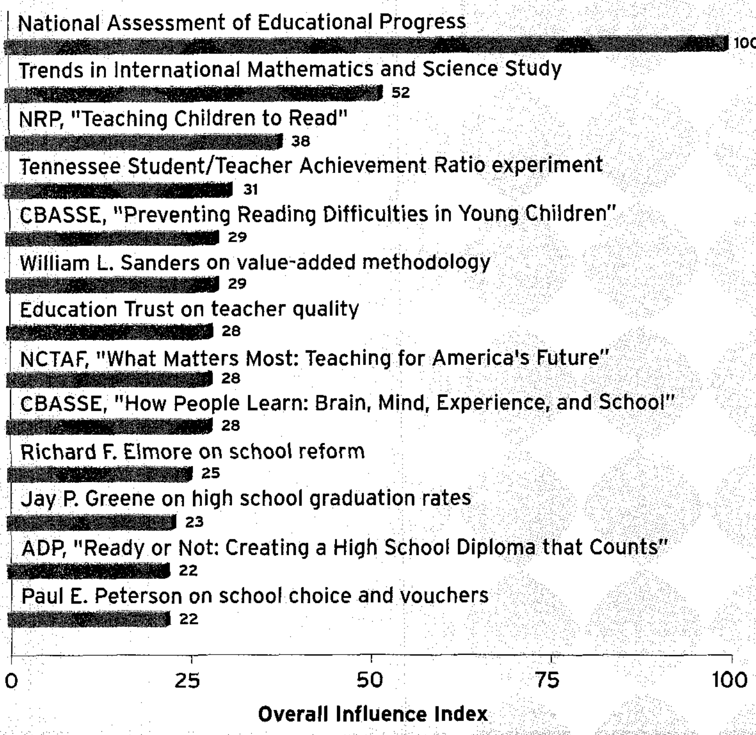
Nevertheless, those of us at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, unabashed influence peddlers for sure, were curious about the impact of education studies published over the past decade or so. (We're turning ten this year.) Among other things, we wanted to know whether the most influential studies were also the best studies, or if there was something else that explained their prominence.

So we contracted with the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, publishers of *Education Week*, to find out. They surveyed a host of education insiders, analyzed citations in academic journals, and tallied media hits. They computed scores across those three categories and identified 13 studies that stood head and shoulders above the rest (see Figure 1).

The list is eclectic. The studies range from large-scale assessments (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS]), to evaluations of specific interventions (class-size reduction and vouchers), to commission reports (National Reading Panel, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future), to data analyses (Education Trust on teacher quality, Jay Greene on graduation rates). What to make of them? Is a study's influence related to its rigor?

At first blush, the most rigorous methodology, randomized field trials (RFT), appears not to fare well, since few such studies made the list. But solid RFT studies exist in only a handful of areas in education—class-size reduction, early reading, vouchers—and all appear here. Indeed, it's hard to think of any RFT work more than a few years old that didn't make the cut.

The Most Influential Education Studies of the Past Decade (Figure 1)



SOURCE: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy," October 2006

Policy analysts using other methodologies can also take heart. Smart, provocative data analyses or syntheses pack a punch. Look at the Education Trust on teacher quality, for example. Its "studies" were short policy briefs that combined solid research, unimpeachable data, and a powerful and popular ideology ("close the achievement gap") in an accessible format.

Of course, influence is inevitably linked to impact, to discernible changes in policy or practice (for better or for worse). On this count, all sorts of studies have enjoyed success. The National Reading Panel led directly to the federal Reading First program. The Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio Experiment (STAR) class-size study inspired action at the federal and state levels. Jay Greene's work on graduation rates prompted a commitment by the governors to report these data in a consistent fashion. Ed Trust's work led to the "highly qualified teachers requirement

The Winners *Thirteen influential education studies*

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), broadly known as the "Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative assessment that enables comparisons of results across states and jurisdictions as well as changes in results over time.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
TIMSS assesses student achievement in mathematics and science at the 4th- and 8th-grade levels in the United States and other participating countries. In 2003, some 46 countries took part.

National Reading Panel (NRP), "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction," 2000
Congress convened the National Reading Panel in 1997 and charged its members with reviewing research-based findings on reading instruction. The panel reviewed only studies that appeared in English in a refereed journal, that focused on children's reading development from preschool through grade 12, and that were experimental or quasi-experimental in design.

Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) Experiment
In this four-year longitudinal class-size study, more than 7,000 students in 79 schools were randomly assigned to one of three classroom situations: small class (13 to 17 students per teacher), regular class (22 to 25 students per teacher), or regular class with a full-time teacher's aide. An analysis of academic achievement found that smaller class sizes resulted in higher achievement than either of the regular class-size situations.

The National Academies' Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (CBASSE), "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," 1998
This commission reviewed research on topics related to the development of reading and reading outcomes, such as normal reading development and instruction, factors identifying groups and individuals at risk for reading difficulties, and prevention, intervention, and instructional approaches related to positive reading outcomes. The commission report found that many factors can promote learning to read, such as exposure to experiences in early childhood, promoting motivation related to reading, and attendance at schools that provide effective reading instruction.

William L. Sanders on Value-Added Methodology and the Tennessee Value-Added Accountability System
This statistical methodology introduced a new paradigm for predicting student academic progress and comparing the prediction to the contribution of individual teachers (or value added) as measured by student gain scores. Sanders's methodology can provide an indication of an individual teacher's effectiveness based on his or her students' performance.

The Education Trust on Teacher Quality
The Education Trust has produced a number of noted reports on teacher quality. "Good Teaching Matters: How Well-Qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap" (1998) makes the case that the capability of the teacher, rather than influences from outside the classroom, has the strongest effect on student learning. In addition, the report highlights data showing that poor and minority students are more likely to be taught by less-qualified teachers.

SOURCE: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy," October 2006 in NCLB." Paul Peterson's voucher studies helped shape the D.C. voucher experiment authorized by Congress. And the American Diploma Project report motivated at least 25 states to vow to align their K–12 outcome standards with their higher-education entrance expectations. None of these actions was automatic—each was pushed by advocates with agendas—but it's fair to say that policy or practice would be different had the studies never been published.

As for NAEP and its international cousin, TIMSS, though they surely differ in kind from the others, we dare not underestimate their influence. NAEP isn't called the "Nation's Report Card" for nothing, and the man on the street (and the reporter in the field) cares most of all about whether test scores are rising, which states are falling behind, and whether we can compete in world markets. These "horse race" questions are likely to drive the education influence industry for years to come. ■

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF), "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," 1996
This commission report maps out a plan for providing every child with high-quality teaching by attracting, developing, and supporting excellent teachers. It contends that the capability of the teacher has the strongest effect on student learning, and that "recruiting, preparing, and retaining" quality teachers is the most important way to improve education.

The National Academies' Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (CBASSE), "How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School," 1999
This commission report brings together findings from the fields of neuroscience, cognitive and social psychology, human development, and emerging technologies in examining the processes of effective learning and the environments in which learning best takes place. Key findings include the idea that students come to the classroom with preconceived notions of how the world works. If their schooling does not engage these notions, students may not grasp new concepts that they are taught.

Richard F. Elmore on School Reform
Drawing on his personal interactions with Community District #2 in New York City, Elmore promotes the idea that school reform cannot be imposed through artificial constructs developed by outside policymakers, but must begin from the inside with a commitment by educators to develop the knowledge, structures, and practices at the heart of instruction. His work examines the promise of distributed leadership, the potential for improved incentive systems to promote effective practices and bring them to scale, and the necessity to maintain a tight focus on instruction within an internalized accountability system.

Jay P. Greene on High-School Graduation Rates
Greene's "High School Graduation Rates in the United States" (revised in 2002) employs a unique method for calculating graduation rates and presents his own rates for each of the 50 states, for distinct racial and ethnic group breakdowns, and for the 50 largest school districts. Greene's results suggest that high-school graduation rates in the United States are lower than the public previously believed.

American Diploma Project (ADP), "Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts," 2004
Achieve, Inc., the Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation established the American Diploma Project, whose report contends that the high-school diploma too often fails to signify that students are well prepared for postsecondary education or the workplace. As a remedy, it provides "college and workplace readiness benchmarks" designed to help states align their high-school assessments and graduation requirements with the demands of credit-bearing college courses and quality jobs.

Paul E. Peterson on School Choice and Vouchers
Peterson's studies of voucher programs, including publicly funded programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, find that participating African American students make greater academic gains than similar students who are not enrolled in the program. Peterson's research also addresses the equality issue in the vouchers debate, rejecting the notion that voucher programs "skim" the best and brightest students away from public schools.

—Michael J. Petrilli

Mutual Selection Beats Random Assignment

Let student teachers and mentors choose the best fit

BY SARA FRY

Preparing student teachers for the classroom should include practice with support and guidance from a skilled mentor teacher. Although hard data are difficult to come by, it seems student teachers are most often assigned mentors more or less at random. The university where I earned my teacher certification in secondary social studies takes a different approach, known as mutual selection: interns begin the school year observing and assisting in different classes. Shortly after Thanksgiving, interns ask one or two teachers to be their mentor(s). Those teachers can accept or decline the placement.

PHOTO COURTESY AUTHOR

As a student teacher supervisor, I see few genuine mentoring relationships develop between student teachers and randomly assigned mentors.

During my first month, I spent a lot of time in the classrooms of two high school social studies teachers. Mr. Hayes taught American History. He took a businesslike approach to teaching, and he taught me how to grade student work efficiently. When students misbehaved, he brought them into the hallway where he would discuss the problem, instruct the students to change their behavior, and shake their hands before they returned to the classroom together. Mr. Raymond's World History classroom looked traditional, but his teaching style got everyone up and out of their seats to work together on projects. He was widely adored. On the first day of school, he was two minutes late entering the classroom because so many of his former students had stopped to give him hugs and say hello. I was certain I would ask Mr. Raymond and Mr. Hayes to be my mentors.

In late September, my internship supervisor shared devastating news: I had to observe in the middle school. In my experience, middle schools were horrible places filled with unhappy students. To my surprise, it was wonderful! The kids were happy and enthusiastic. The social studies content was engaging—ancient world cultures and geography. And I discovered Ms. Brook, who used humor in her teaching, storytelling as an alternative to lecture, and project-based learning; she managed her classroom with a firm yet caring approach. I quickly decided that I would like to student teach with Mary Brook.

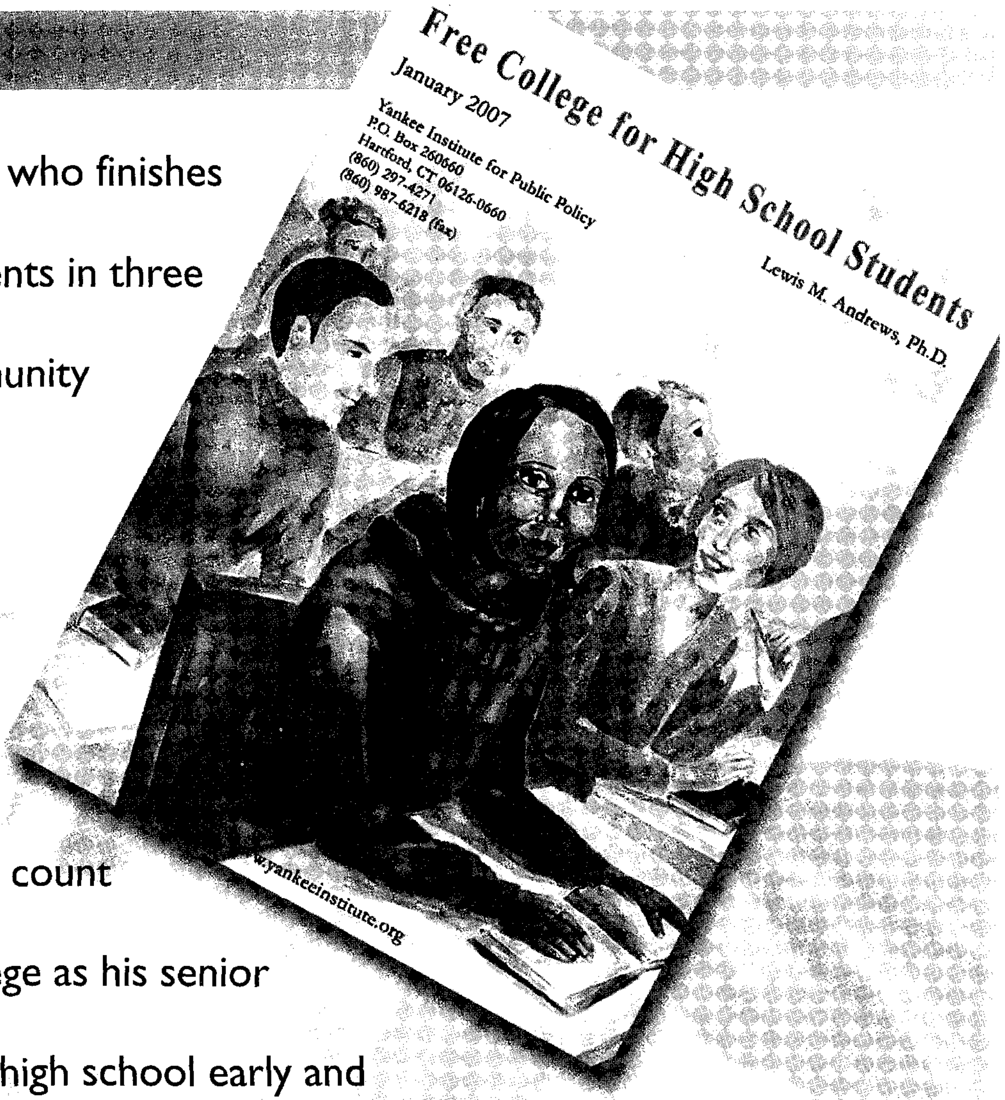
From January to May, Mary and I taught three classes of 8th-grade world cultures and two classes of 7th-grade geography. She proved to be a true mentor, even after I left her classroom. During my difficult first year teaching in a tough inner-city school, I was overwhelmed by the discipline issues I faced. Mary spent more than two hours with me on the phone after my first day in my own classroom.

In a traditional teacher-training program, I would have been asked *before* beginning my internship only to indicate a preference for a middle- or high-school placement. My request would unequivocally have been for a high-school assignment, and I would not have been assigned to Mary. With traditional student teaching assignments, university administrators or school districts assign pre-service teachers to in-service teachers with little or no knowledge of either person's personality or teaching style. Not surprisingly, many mentoring relationships are strained and troubled. Today, as a student teacher supervisor, I see few genuine mentoring relationships develop between student teachers and randomly assigned mentors.

Ideally, a mentor offers support while communicating clear, meaningful feedback specifically designed to help the student teacher improve her practice. Such a "critical friendship" develops most easily when the mentor and student teacher have compatible teaching styles and personalities. Mutual selection allows student and mentor teachers who are already acquainted, and know they are compatible, to agree to work together, making a successful partnership far more likely.

Sara Fry is assistant professor of education at Bucknell University.

Read the newest policy idea from the Yankee Institute for Public Policy:



Free College for High School Students

January 2007

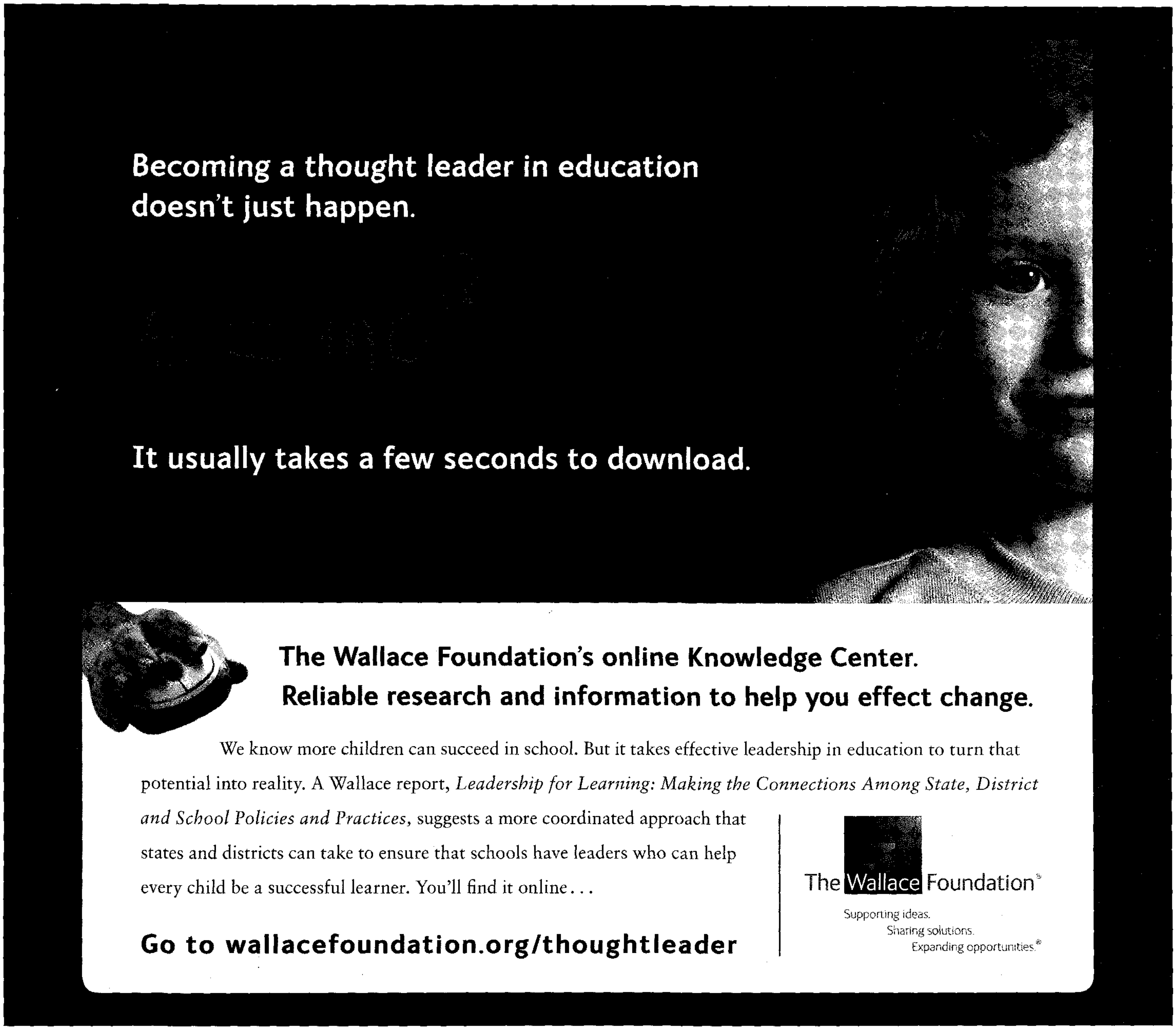
Yankee Institute for Public Policy
P.O. Box 260660
Hartford, CT 06126-0660
(860) 297-4271
(860) 987-6218 (fax)

Lewis M. Andrews, Ph.D.

w.yankeeinstitute.org

Give every high school student who finishes his or her graduation requirements in three years a full scholarship to community college. Because two years of community college can cost less than one year of high school, taxpayers actually save money. Under our plan, the student can count his first year of community college as his senior year of high school or graduate high school early and go on to college.

To learn more, go to **www.yankeeinstitute.org**, click on
School Reform, and download
"Free College for High School Students" at no charge.
Or send $2.95 for each hard copy you want to:
Yankee Institute, P.O. Box 260660, Hartford, Connecticut 06126.
(Check payable to "The Yankee Institute")



Becoming a thought leader in education doesn't just happen.

It usually takes a few seconds to download.

The Wallace Foundation's online Knowledge Center.
Reliable research and information to help you effect change.

We know more children can succeed in school. But it takes effective leadership in education to turn that potential into reality. A Wallace report, *Leadership for Learning: Making the Connections Among State, District and School Policies and Practices*, suggests a more coordinated approach that states and districts can take to ensure that schools have leaders who can help every child be a successful learner. You'll find it online . . .

Go to wallacefoundation.org/thoughtleader

The Wallace Foundation®

Supporting ideas.
Sharing solutions.
Expanding opportunities.®

EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH
309 CGIS South
1730 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-3001
Tel. (617) 495-2491, Fax (617) 496-1507
Website www.educationnext.org

To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at 1-800-935-2882; visit us at www.educationnext.org; fax us at (650) 723-8626; email us at educationnext@hoover.stanford.edu; or write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010

Nonprofit
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 26
Peterborough, NH
03458

10070 XXXX 1

Ron K Unz
No. 371
555 Bryant St
Palo Alto CA 94301-1704